

DEVELOPING A CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	3
ABSTRACT .....	5
OPSOMMING .....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
<b>Methodology</b> .....	13
<b>Definitions of Main Concepts</b> .....	14
CHAPTER 1 .....	16
CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY DEFINED IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE .....	16
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	16
<b>1.2 The Historical Context of the Study of Church Planting Movement Strategy</b> .....	16
<b>1.3 Forerunners of People Movement Strategy</b> .....	19
<b>1.4 Pioneer studies of People Movements in India in the 1930's</b> .....	25
<b>1.5 A Theoretical Definition of Church Planting Movement Strategy</b> .....	31
1.5.1 Distinction between “mass movement” and “people movement” .....	31
1.5.2 A working definition of people movement strategy.....	33
1.5.3 The Basic Inquiry of People Movement Theory .....	34
1.5.4 The sociological basis upon which People Movement Theory is based .....	35
1.5.5 The model by which People Movement Theory operates.....	37
1.5.6 The goal toward which People Movement Strategy is directed.....	40
<b>1.6 Church Planting Movements defined in light of People-Movement Strategy</b> .....	41
<b>1.7 Some major technical themes in Church Planting Movement Strategy</b> .....	43
1.7.1 Evangelization within homogeneous units or segments in People-Conscious Societies.....	43
1.7.2 Evangelization by the principle of group conversion in Communal Societies .....	47
1.7.3 Evangelization through kinship webs In Extended-Family Integrated Societies .....	51
<b>1.8 Problems with the Church Growth Movement and People Movements</b> .....	53
1.8.1 Analysis of People Movement concept from the Indian context .....	53
CHAPTER 2 .....	57
CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY COMPARED WITH TRADITIONAL MISSION STRATEGY .....	57
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	57
<b>2.2 Traditional Missionary Strategy</b> .....	58
2.2.1 Societal resistance to Western Missionary-Introduced Christianity .....	58
2.2.2 Missions and Colonialism.....	60
2.2.3 Missionary influence and National response.....	66
2.2.4 Implications of Traditional Mission Strategy .....	73
<b>2.3 Evaluation of the Church Planting Movement Strategy as compared to Traditional Mission Strategy</b> .....	75
2.3.1 The theological and missiological question of individual conversion and group declaration.....	75
2.3.2 The alternative model of the Church Planting Movement strategy .....	78
CHAPTER 3 .....	90
CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY CONNECTED TO BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS ....	90
<b>3.2 The New Testament Oikos as a basis for Church Planting Movement Strategy</b> .....	90
3.2.1 Introduction.....	90
3.2.2 The meaning of <i>oikos</i> in the New Testament.....	90
3.2.3 The role of <i>oikos</i> in Church Planting Movements.....	95
3.2.4 Strategic implications for India .....	101
<b>3.3 The New Testament “Man of Peace” as a basis for Church Planting Movement Strategy</b> .....	104
3.3.1 The meaning of “Man of Peace” in the New Testament.....	104
3.3.2 The role of the Person of Peace in Church Planting Movements .....	108

CHAPTER 4 .....	113
CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY CONSIDERED IN LIGHT OF SOTERIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING AND CASTE AMONG HINDUS .....	113
<b>4.1 Salvation in Hindu Context</b> .....	113
4.1.1 A brief comparison between conversion and salvation.....	113
4.1.2 Hindu understanding of salvation.....	115
4.1.3 Comparison and Evaluation .....	134
4.1.4 Application for missionary strategy.....	139
CHAPTER 5 .....	141
IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODEL AND STRATEGY THAT IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS AMONG FORWARD CASTE HINDUS .....	141
<b>5.1 Toward a Dharmic Christianity</b> .....	141
5.1.1 Introduction.....	141
5.1.2 A living spirituality.....	143
5.1.4 Toward a missiology of Hindu culture.....	144
5.1.5 Religion or discipleship? .....	146
5.1.6 A proposed model and strategy.....	151
6. CONCLUSION .....	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	167
Books Cited.....	167
<i><b>Bibles</b></i> .....	181
1991. <i>Life Application Study Bible, New International Version</i> . Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. ....	181
<i><b>Dissertations</b></i> .....	181
<i><b>Periodicals</b></i> .....	181

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation acknowledges the need for Church Planting Movements among the unreached peoples of India. Of particular concern to this study is the application of Church Planting Movement strategy to forward caste Hindus of India.

It traces the historical development of group or people movement strategy and then compares that strategy with traditional missionary approaches in India. It shows that evangelizing households is the primary strategy of the New Testament and the most appropriate strategy for initiating Church Planting Movements. The thesis carefully examines salvation understanding in the Hindu context and its relationship to the caste system. All of this lays a foundation for a proper approach to evangelization of forward caste Hindus in light of the fact that there have been no documented Church Planting Movements among *forward* caste Hindus in all of India.

The paper concludes that the best approach to facilitating a Church Planting Movement among forward caste Hindus is by *not* planting churches. As contradictory as this sounds, the paper shows that Christian disciples remaining within Hindu culture and familial systems holds the potential for the most indigenous approach to establishing multiplying churches among forward caste Hindus.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling beklemtoon die belangrikheid van Kerkplant-bewegings onder die onberektes van Indië. Die hoofklem val op 'n Kerkplant-beweging strategie om die kaste Hindoes te bereik.

Die geskiedenis van die groeps- en volksbewegings en strategieë word nagevors en vergelyk met tradisionele sendingbenaderings in Indië. Die evangelisering van huishoudings word in die Nuwe Testament beklemtoon en dit vorm inderdaad die uitgangspunt vir die inisiëring van Kerkgroei-bewegings. Hoe die Hindoes verlossing verstaan word ondersoek in die konteks van die kaste sisteem. Dit lê die grondslag vir die aanvaarbare benadering in die evangelisering van kaste Hindoes in die lig van die feit dat daar geen gedokumenteerde verlae bestaan oor die Kerkplant-bewegings onder die ontwikkelde kaste van Indië nie

Die standpunt word gestel dat die beste benadering om Kerkgroei te bevorder deur die Kerkplant- beweging onder ontwikkelde kaste juis is om nie kerke te plant nie. Teenstrydig soos dit mag voorkom, word aangetoon dat Christelike dissipels wat binne die Hindoe kulture en gesinsgroepe bly die beste potensiaal vir die verinheemsing van die evangelie en die beste geleetheid om kerke onder ontwikkelde kaste Hindoes te laat groei, bied.

## INTRODUCTION

The urgent need in missionary endeavor among Hindus<sup>1</sup> today is to reach the multitudes of people groups in such a way as to convince them to commit themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord, be baptized, and participate actively in the establishment and multiplication of indigenous churches. The greatest church planting challenge is among the forward caste Hindus. Although missionaries have served for hundreds of years in India and among Hindus, the vast majority of them remain untouched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not much has changed from the day of William Carey. Carey stated in a letter to his sisters dated August 9, 1808, and written from Calcutta: "This part of the world is, as it respects divine things, a vast uncultivated wilderness. We see thousands and thousands of people wherever we go and no extent of charity can make us say of one of them, 'That is a Christian.' I am often discouraged when I see the ignorance, superstition, and vice with which this country abounds" (Carter 2000, 66). Not much has changed over the past one hundred and fifty years. How is this possible? How is it possible that the Christian advances made among Hindus remain largely isolated, infrequent, and for the most part sterile? This in no way discounts the sporadic movements among the 'untouchables'<sup>2</sup> and tribals, but queries the missionary enterprise's minimal impact on the majority of Hindus.

The central problem addressed in this study is whether or not the

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<sup>1</sup> Hinduism has assumed a world-religion character through a complex process of cultural, political, social, and religious construction over the last two hundred years. For guidance on conceptual problems inherent in the contemporary use of the term "Hinduism," see R. E. Frykenberg, "Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxiii, 3 (Winter 1993), pages 523-50 and *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, South Asian Studies No. xxiv (New Delhi, 1989), pages 29-49.

<sup>2</sup> 'Untouchable' is one of the many names used historically to describe those groups belonging to the fifth (Panchama) varna outside of the Indian caste system. Some names, such as Depressed Class, Scheduled Class, or Harijan were invented by government leaders to portray a less negative image of these people for their own political purposes. These different names were devised to reduce the stigma connected with older designations or to unify several oppressed groups into one identifiable category. Other designations, such as Adivasi, Adi-Dravida, and Adi-Andhra, were invented by untouchable groups. Whichever designation is used, each carries with it potent political and historical connotations. Today, those who were formally called untouchables' prefer the self-designation, "Dalit." See 'What is "dalit" and Dalitism?' *Dalit Voice*, II, 16 (1-15 June 1983), pp. 1-2, 11.

individual approach to evangelism and traditional church planting methodology most often practiced among Hindus is the most effective way to evangelize the forward caste. The heritage and legacy of evangelism by the Christian Church in South Asia traditionally is traced to Thomas, one of the original twelve apostles. Still, the present day Roman Catholic Church and Churches of the Protestant confessions have their more immediate roots in what is commonly known as the modern missionary movement. “Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenburg in 1517, but not until 1706 did any of the new Protestant Churches of Europe send missionaries to work in India” (Boyd 1981, 15). “On July 9, 1706, two Germans landed on the southeastern coast of India in the Danish colony called Tranquebar. Nearly two hundred years after Martin Luther had begun the Reformation of European Christianity in Germany they had come to be his Evangelical voice to Indians of all sorts” (Hudson 2000, 1). One of the most influential of these in India was the Church Missionary Society, which began its life on Friday, 12 April of 1799. Sixteen evangelical clergymen and nine laymen gathered and resolved that, it “‘being a duty highly incumbent upon every Christian to endeavour to propagate the knowledge of the Gospel among the Heathen,’ a society to achieve that end be constituted: the Society for Missions to Africa and the East” (Ward 2000, 1). From the mid nineteenth century to about twenty years following Independence there were at any given time, 5,000 to 7,000 foreign missionaries at work all over the country. Beginning with the mid-sixties, their numbers have steadily declined, with few possessing resident permit status. A number of others operate in country under other types of visas, but their primary purpose remains evangelistic. However, the problem in evangelizing Hindus lies not with the number of foreign or indigenous missionaries but rather their corresponding evangelistic approach.

Missionaries have frequently stated their evangelistic impact in India in triumphant terms; in 1934, Stephen Neill wrote, “In almost every corner of the country, the Christian Church has touched every stratum of society” (Neill 1934, 11). Indian leaders themselves have spoken positively concerning the impact of Christianity and missionary efforts. In the early 1950’s, Rajaiah D. Paul stated, “The educated Hindu has for the most part been profoundly affected by Christianity and the education he has received, perhaps in a Christian school or college” (Paul 1942, 89). Actual results have been more modest and have not kept up with the explosive population growth among Hindus. Missionaries were often prejudiced against the very people they came to evangelize and this attitude continues today, even among indigenous missionaries as they deal cross culturally with other races,



tribes or castes (*Varnashrama*<sup>3</sup> is the Indian brand of racism). In addition, western missionaries have not always been entirely factual in reporting to their constituency. The following is one example:

It is observed that children in heathen lands are like “wild asses, colts,” ungoverned, ungovernable, idle and dissolute. Missionaries in contrast to pagan parents, make them learned, and can fit them also to be missionaries in their turns (Beaver 1968, 50).

Missionaries also struggled with host cultures, imposing Western strictures on Indian Christians. Khushwant Singh observed that “many Christians continued bearing high sounding English names, their women wore a comical mixture of European and Indian dress. Their hymns translated (and) sung to outlandish tunes evoked more derision than reverence” (Singh 1992, 76). Jack C. Winslow, a friend of Gandhi, wrote, “missionaries with the Gospel brought unessential Western accompaniments” (Winslow 1954, 77). In addition, missionaries concentrated evangelistic efforts among the high caste, but with little success. Surveying the growth of Methodism in India, Rupert Davis observed that “the early attempts at reaching the high caste people had failed utterly, and it became a matter of policy to pursue evangelism by the indirect path

of schools, colleges and hospitals” (Davis 1963, 171). The relatively few converts to Christianity were called upon to separate themselves radically from society and missionaries taught the Christians to reject every Hindu custom indiscriminately (Bergquist 1974, 111-113). This attitude made Christians and their churches dependent on Western missionaries and alienated them from the mainstream of Indian life (Houghton 1983, 246).

In some cases new converts were extracted from their culture of necessity because their high caste families had threatened their lives. But extracting people from the community to the mission compound stopped ‘people group’ movements to Christ (Rajendran 1998, 25-26).

Becoming a Christian, especially a mission compound resident, created in effect a new Christian caste rather than transforming the castes and cultures from which the converts came (Gandhi 1941, 27). All too often “in the process of preaching Christ, missionaries were involved in public ridicule of

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<sup>3</sup> Varnaschramadharma is the official designation for the Brahminical social order consisting of various varnas or ritual classes. The four ritual classes of society are said to derive from the head (Brahmin), shoulders (Kshatriya), abdomen and thighs (Vaishya), and feet (Sudra) of the primordial man (*Purusa*) at the creation of the universe.

Hinduism” (Richard 1991, 12). This evidenced a sense of exclusivism that held the Indian as inferior to the Western missionary; “Missionary history in India is inextricably tied to colonialism, a stigma that mars the work of Christ to this day” (Houghton 1983, 246).

Stated succinctly, the desire of this paper is to know whether or not the individualistic evangelistic and missionary dominated approaches of the past have actually hindered or aided the work of evangelism among forward caste Hindus. The goal of this study is to develop a culturally appropriate approach to evangelizing forward caste Hindus for maximum effectiveness.

In the country of India, there are over eight hundred million Hindus.<sup>4</sup> There are another sixty million Hindus scattered in other countries throughout the world. Hindus, regardless of their geographical location, live behind walls that are invisible but nonetheless real. The wall that encloses the Hindus is a social and religious system of Hinduism in which people are fitted into one another like bricks in a wall; they are not free to move out of their place. This basic value system encloses people and prevents them from being free to choose new directions in their lives.

There are about twenty million Christians in India, with a large percentage of these drawn from tribal societies.<sup>5</sup> “When we view the task of the mission of God in India, we see that the citadel of Hinduism has not really been penetrated by the Christian church” (David 1998, 2). Most evangelism is taking place today in India with teams distributing Christian literature all over the country, gospel programs being broadcast in the major languages of the country, and even a number of indigenous mission agencies involved in communicating the gospel, but for some reason the message of the Gospel is not penetrating into the minds and hearts of the followers of *Sanatan Dharma* (Hinduism). How is the Gospel of Christ most effectively communicated so that it penetrates the citadel of Hinduism to the point that Hindus become disciples of Jesus Christ and plant themselves as reproducing worshipping communities within the various *jatis*<sup>6</sup> (castes) of Hinduism?

The need for a new evangelistic paradigm among forward caste Hindus is demanded by the obvious failure of past methodologies. The thesis of this paper

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<sup>4</sup> Hindus are 81.3% of the total population of 1,029,991,145 (a July 2001 estimate). These statistics come from the website of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States government. The address is: [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html).

<sup>5</sup> Christians constitute 2.3% of India's total population.

<sup>6</sup> *Varnas* as ritual classes differ from *jatis*, which are endogamous castes of birth, although *jatis* are commonly classified according to *varna*.

is that the Church Planting Movement strategy provides the most viable missionary approach for facilitating an evangelistic response among forward caste Hindus. Properly understood and incorporated into missionary strategy, the church planting movement provides an acceptable pattern by which mutually-interdependent groups of persons (i.e. forward caste Hindus) may become Christian disciples without disrupting their normal social interrelationships and without becoming isolated from their other non-Christian relatives and friends. This study aims at being an effective tool for missionaries and evangelists, both international and indigenous, as well as mission agencies involved in planning and implementing evangelistic/missionary strategies among forward caste Hindus. It is the author's hope that this study will contribute toward a better understanding and use of the principles of the Church Planting Movement strategy and to a clearer awareness of the historical and cultural realities of the missionary endeavors among Hindus, with the result that mission strategists and missionaries might be stimulated to redirect their efforts and resources toward a greater evangelistic response among forward caste Hindus.

This study brings the theory of the Church Planting Movement strategy into focus and states it in theoretical form, compares it to traditional missionary methods in evangelization, examines it in light of relevant case studies, and demonstrates it as a feasible alternative for evangelism strategy among forward caste Hindus by developing a Church Planting Movement model. This study will contribute not only to a better understanding of the dynamic and principles of the church planting movement strategy but will also provide a realistic and workable model for evangelizing forward caste Hindus.

The intent of this thesis is to discover the thrust of what has already been uncovered about the Church Planting Movement strategy by earlier authorities and missionary practitioners and then apply these principles to the specific historical, sociological and religious context of forward caste Hindus. The study accepts the theological validity and historical significance of people movements as presented by J. Waskom Pickett, Donald McGavran, as well as those presented by contemporary missionaries in the form of verifiable case studies. A pair of terms, "people movement strategy" and "mission-station strategy," were coined by Donald McGavran in his influential book, *The Bridges of God*; however, whereas the designation "people movements" was the term used by

Pickett and McGavran,<sup>7</sup> it has largely been replaced by the more contemporary, “Church Planting Movements.” This newly adopted phrase is largely used in this study and is done with the definition in mind offered by David Garrison of the International Mission Board: “A Church Planting Movement (CPM) is a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment” (Garrison 1999, 7). By defining people movements in this way, a related model or strategy is assumed. The purpose of this study is to uncover that related model for evangelizing forward caste Hindus.

This work is organized into five chapters. The first two discuss the theoretical considerations related to the people-movement theory and the church planting movement methodological strategy. Chapter three considers the biblical foundation for Church Planting Movements and Chapter four examines the historical and sociological factors among forward caste Hindus. Chapter five contains the author’s conclusions concerning the needed transition in missionary methodology among forward caste Hindus.

Chapter one surveys people-movement strategy both in terms of a historical phenomenon and a formulated missionary strategy, starting with the genesis of people-movement studies in India in the 1930’s. The work next proposes a theoretical definition of church planting movements and distinguishes them from the misleading concept of “mass movements.” Finally, the author states and considers the major technical themes involved in church planting movement theory: evangelization within homogeneous units in societal strata, group-oriented conversion in communal societies, and communication through kinship networks in extended-family sociological structures.

Chapter two compares the church planting movement strategy with traditional mission strategy, discusses the central theological issues underlying the two, and demonstrates the two alternative models by which evangelization might be implemented in resistant communal societies. Evaluation of the implications of the mode of evangelization upon the lives of the converts and upon the nature of the churches produced is also included.

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<sup>7</sup> In *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, Pickett, McGavran, Singh, and Warnshuis distinguish the meaning of the term “people movement.” In a chapter entitled, “The People Movement Point of View,” McGavran explains that basic to the concept is the idea of segments of society: “A people is a society whose members marry exclusively within it. Whether such a caste or tribe is really racially distinct from others is immaterial. . . Its intimate life will be restricted to itself. . . Whether persons of other tribes or castes become Christians or Communists makes little difference to persons of intense people consciousness. . . Thus it happens that Christianity, as long as it remains outside a people, makes very slow progress, but, once inside, it flows readily throughout it.” (Pickett 1956, 5)

Chapter three examines the biblical foundation for the church planting movement strategy with a focus on the meaning of the Greek term *oikos* and its implications for church planting. Closely connected to the *oikos* aspect of church planting is the “man of peace” principal introduced by Jesus himself. It will be shown that rather than being a novel approach to mission and church planting strategy, *oikos* evangelism beginning with the person of peace is appropriate biblically, culturally, and missiologically.

Chapter four considers the church planting movement strategy in light of salvation in Hindu context as well as the caste system and the related social and religious structures among forward caste Hindus. Various views of salvation in Hinduism with the corresponding meaning for church planting are considered. The chapter also delineates the terminology of the Hindu extended-family system, and then examines the larger sociological structures pertinent to forward caste Hindus.

Chapter five presents the conclusion that the communal principle in Hindu society is the milieu in which effective evangelization may occur among forward caste Hindus. The author then calls for a reappraisal of historic presuppositions and policies inherent in traditional missionary strategy and recommends that fresh attention be given to the implementation of a model and strategy that is conducive to the development of church planting movements among forward caste Hindus. The new evangelism strategy and model should be given priority and become the core of all future evangelistic and church planting efforts among them. Finally, it seriously considers the evangelistic value of indigenous Hindu culture and sociological structures and the caste system and seeks to utilize them as natural channels for communication of the gospel and bridges for the establishment of reproducing expressions of the Church of Jesus Christ.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this examination of church planting movements in Indian context is actually a combination of several modes of research. First, church planting movements are shown to be a modern application of the much older mass or people movements as examined and promoted by Pickett and McGavran. This connection is examined through the writings of these as well as other pertinent scholars. Second, the New Testament concept of *oikos* is explored as a possible explanation of and foundation for church planting movement strategy. While admittedly anything but a full exegetical study, the intent is to explain church planting movement strategy from the perspective of *oikos* using New Testament

background. Finally, conclusions are drawn based upon academic research, personal 'field' experience, as well as an informed missiology. This varied use of methodology should insure accuracy of research and conclusions.

### **Definitions of Main Concepts**

Several terms and concepts are necessarily central to this study. While admittedly simplistic, the author understands and makes use of the following distinctions: "Mission" is the total redemptive purpose of God to establish his kingdom in this world; "missions" is the activity of God's people, the church, to join God in proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God to the world. Critical to this study is the concept of caste in general and forward castes in particular. While these are described in detail in the paper, a summary is in order. Caste has undergone significant change since independence, but it still involves hundreds of millions of people. In its preamble, India's constitution forbids negative public discrimination on the basis of caste. However, caste ranking and caste-based interaction have occurred for centuries and will continue to do so well into the foreseeable future, more in the countryside than in urban settings and more in the realms of kinship and marriage than in less personal interactions.

Castes are ranked, named, endogamous (in-marrying) groups, membership in which is achieved by birth. There are thousands of castes and sub-castes in India, and these large kinship-based groups are fundamental to South Asian social structure. Each caste is part of a locally based system of interdependence with other groups, involving occupational specialization, and is linked in complex ways with networks that stretch across regions and throughout the nation.

The word *caste* derives from the Portuguese *casta* meaning breed, race, or kind. Among the Indian terms that are sometimes translated as caste are *varna*, *jati*, *jat*, *biradri*, and *samaj*. *Varna*, or 'color,' actually refers to large divisions that include various castes; the other terms include castes and subdivisions of castes sometimes called sub-castes. Many castes are traditionally associated with an occupation, such as high-ranking Brahmans; middle-ranking farmer and artisan groups, such as potters, barbers, and carpenters; and very low-ranking "Untouchable" leatherworkers, butchers, launderers, and latrine cleaners. Members of the "forward" or higher-ranking castes tend, on the whole, to be more prosperous than members of lower-ranking castes. Many lower-caste people live in conditions of great poverty and social disadvantage.

According to the Rig Veda, sacred texts that date back to oral traditions of more than 3,000 years ago, progenitors of the four ranked *varna* groups sprang from various parts of the body of the primordial man, which Brahma created from clay. Each group had a function in sustaining the life of society--the social body. Brahmins, or priests, were created from the mouth. They were to provide for the intellectual and spiritual needs of the community. Kshatriyas, warriors and rulers, were derived from the arms. Their role was to rule and to protect others. Vaishyas--landowners and merchants--sprang from the thighs, and were entrusted with the care of commerce and agriculture. Shudras--artisans and servants--came from the feet. Their task was to perform all manual labor. Later conceptualized was a fifth category, "Untouchable" menials, relegated to carrying out very menial and polluting work related to bodily decay and dirt. Since 1935, "Untouchables" have been known as Scheduled Castes, referring to their listing on government rosters, or schedules. They are also often called by Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi's term *Harijans*, or "Children of God." Many politically conscious members of these groups prefer to refer to themselves as Dalits, a Hindi word meaning oppressed or downtrodden.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY DEFINED IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Church Planting Movement strategy, like so many other mission strategies, has evolved over an extended period of time. It began as an unexplained and yet powerful phenomenon that later men began to describe in terms of a theory. Finally, through gradual amplification and refinement those theoretical insights were stated and developed into a practical working strategy for implementation by field missionaries. Before examining Church Planting Movement strategy as it is understood today, it is helpful to summarize the evolutionary process by which it has arrived in its present form and function.

### **1.2 The Historical Context of the Study of Church Planting Movement Strategy**

Man usually discerns the designs of God in process over a period of years. Such is the case with understanding the reality and significance of the Church Planting Movement strategy. Church planting movements or people movements have been a fundamental ingredient in the expansion of the Christian Church from its inception by the Lord Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. The message of hope in Christ was initially planted in the fertile soil of Judaism. In at least one segment of that highly group-conscious people, the gospel message took root and was transmitted from person to person, brother to brother, family to family, until finally the time was ripe for an observable manifestation which would conceptualize what had already become consensus among a sizable group of people.

On the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, Christ's Church sprang forth in tangible form with tremendous power, in an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and subsequent ingathering of a multitude of people. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."<sup>8</sup> These early converts were, for the most part, members of a clearly definable unit of society, for they remained in close proximity with one another in faith and fellowship. The good news of salvation continuously and naturally permeated the community, spreading by means of individuals, families, and groups of friends, until it touched every

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:41 (New International Version)



segment of society. The story of Pentecost involved more than the recorded events of that inaugural day:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling the possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.<sup>9</sup>

The remainder of the book of Acts testifies of early evangelistic extension throughout the Mediterranean world of that day, largely through the medium of people movements. From Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, Asia Minor, Rome, and beyond, groups and sub-groups of people became Christian along natural lines of family and societal units.

From the close of the New Testament record until the present, the Christian faith has continued to spread and churches have been established according to a similar pattern. Donald McGavran writes of the vital significance of church planting movements in church history:

At least two-thirds of all converts to Asia, Africa, and Oceania have come to Christian faith through people movements. In many provinces, nine-tenths of all those who first moved out of non-Christian faiths to Christianity came in people movements. Most Christians in Asia and Africa today are descendents of people-movement converts. But for people movements, the Churches on these continents would be very different and very much weaker than they are. People-movement growth has accounted for considerable ingathering in Latin America also. It cannot be forgotten that great movements to Christ were the normal way in which the peoples of Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa became Christian. The Reformation faith also spread across Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, England, Scandinavia, and other lands in a special variety of people movements, very different from the growth of congregations and Churches in Eurica today. (McGavran 1970, 298-299)

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:42-47 (New International Version)

Although clearly the missionary expansion of the Church has largely been accomplished through the medium of church planting movements, the nature of these movements and the principles by which they operate have been little understood by those who have sought to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even the modern missionary movement of Europe and America in the nineteenth century was largely conceived apart from considering the dynamics of people movements. One exception should be noted in the person of Gustav Warneck (1834-1910). As early as 1874, supporting his arguments by extensive biblical exegesis, historical evidence, as well as by citing case studies from missionary experience among the Chola people of Eastern India and the Batak of Sumatra, Gustav Warneck wrote about group conversion as the legitimate goal of missions. While stressing the importance of personal conversion, Warneck maintained that the ultimate goal of preaching the gospel must be to bring *panta ta ethne*, all ethnic groups to Christ. "He who seeks the conversion of individuals only engages in a spiritual 'micro-enterprise,' but he who helps entire families and peoples to submit to Christ as Savior from sin and Lord of life engages in a 'macro-enterprise' for God"<sup>10</sup> (Kasdorf 1980, 116-17).

The pioneering missionary efforts of the modern world have largely been implemented according to an entirely different philosophy than that of the church planting movement strategy. And yet, even as missionaries have gone about their task of establishing centralizing stations and creating institutions, people movements have repeatedly burst forth in various parts of the world, largely unnoticed, unappreciated, and almost always unaided by formal missionary structures. Until well into the twentieth century there was only occasional insight into these phenomena. It was not until the early 1930's that modern missiologists began to discover and appropriate the principles of the people movement approach. Its discovery in India was the beginning of a totally new application of people movement principles in evangelization and church planting. The initial formulations of the basic principles were by J. W. Pickett, A. L. Warnshuis, G. H. Singh, V. S. Azariah, and Donald McGavran.<sup>11</sup> These men proposed much needed

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<sup>10</sup> Kasdorf quotes Warneck from his early work, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, Bd. III, 1: *Der Betrieb der Sendung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Gotha: Perthes, 1902.

<sup>11</sup> J. Waskom Pickett was Director of Mass Movement Study for the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon. Dr. V. S. Azariah was Bishop of Dornakal and Chairman of the National Christian Council. J. Waskom Pickett wrote, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* in 1933. Studies by Pickett, Singh and McGavran were first published under the title, *Christian Missions in Mid-India* in 1936. A second edition was published in 1938 and a third in 1956. Dr. A. L. Warnshuis was a member of the International Missionary Council.

terminology and conveyed the principles of mass movements in language easily understood.

### 1.3 Forerunners of People Movement Strategy

The man regarded as the founder of the Protestant science of missions is the German Lutheran Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) whose dominant understanding of mission was "education" for the "extending of the kingdom" and who aimed at the Christianizing of entire people groups by making the gospel relevant to their existing language, culture and customs. "Christian missions are as old as Christianity itself. The missionary idea, indeed, is much older. In affirming an eternal origin for the Divine decree of salvation, Paul affirms it equally for the universality of salvation. God, who called the universe into being, designed His whole creation from all eternity for a universal salvation" (Warneck 1904, 3).

"In Germany the nineteenth century was the century of missions... Although German missiology has taken a new turn since the Second World War, for many years prior to that Warneck's *Missionslehre* was the standard work for both the theory and practice of German missions" (Verkuyyl 1978, 28). Hans Kasdorf describes the significance of Warneck for the study of missions:

What no one else had heretofore accomplished, was accomplished by him (Gustav Warneck), namely the appropriate formulation and establishment of a permanent scientific discipline to study the mission of God and the mission of the church in the context of the unevangelized world. For this purpose he assumed the first professorship at his *alma mater*, the University of Halle, in 1896. Here Warneck established missiology as a discipline in its own right, reaching both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles. So enormous was his influence, says David Bosch, that a quarter century after his death, Martin Schlunk in 1934 claimed that 'everything that happens in Germany in theory and practice of missions, lives on Warneck's legacy.'

While pastor in Rothenschirmbach (1874-1896), Warneck founded the *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* in 1874 as the first truly scientific missiological journal; he established the *Sachsische Missionskonferenz* in 1879 as a model for other mission conference endeavors; he corresponded with men and women across the globe, fulfilling the role of a pastoral missionary to missionaries with

pastoral needs; and he produced an exceptional history of mission in 1882 that has gone through many revisions and editions since then.

Towering above hundreds of articles and dozens of books is Warneck's five-volume mission theory entitled *Evangelische Missionslehre*. It was specifically this work which made Warneck the father of missiology in general and of Protestant missiology in particular. Therein is reflected not only the capacity of a man to collect, assimilate, interpret, categorize, and systematize an enormous wealth of material into a coherent whole but also his ability to probe deeply the biblical, theological, historical, and cultural resources for answers to burning issues related to church and mission. Never before or since has one single person—not even Donald Anderson McGavran, the founder of the Church Growth School of missiological thought at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena—performed an equal task in missiological history (Kasdorf 1988, 227).

Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was another strong influence on missionary principles. Anderson, a Calvinist and a Congregationalist, taught the importance of evangelizing “the heathen” because he expected the Church to establish the Kingdom of God worldwide as demonstrated by two of his papers: "Promised Advent of the Spirit" and "Time for the World's Conversion Come."

Several of the basic principles Donald McGavran later used in developing his approach to church growth come from these Anglo-American and German missiological roots, including the concepts of responsive peoples, mass conversions, people movements, Christianization, the use of small groups led by local leaders, and the development of an indigenous 'people's' church. However, the man whom McGavran credited with having the most influence over his new thinking was J. Waskom Pickett, whose 1933 study *Mass Movements in India* proposed three concepts that have become key missiological concepts:

- (1) more people came to Christ when mass conversion was allowed than individual conversion.*
- (2) the quality of converts was equal to the post-baptismal care given them.*
- (3) forming people into churches was not necessarily a long and difficult task, as commonly believed.*

A well known theologian played an important role in providing a theology of group movements and house church groups that came from an appeal for church renewal. Emil Brunner (1889-1966) was born in Switzerland, into devout Reformed stock. He studied theology at Berlin and Zurich, taking his doctorate in 1913. He was ordained as a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church, and served as a pastor for several years before appointment at the University of Zurich, where he taught from 1924 to 1953. He was one of Karl Barth's foremost supporters. His books have had a deep impact on theology and missionary thought, as one writer notes:

During the ten years immediately following the war, which were an exciting period of biblical renewal and theological ferment, American theological students in most mainline seminaries and university divinity schools read more works of Brunner than of any other single theologian....However, even after the market for Brunner's books in the English-speaking world wanes and his students have passed off the scene, and even when his name is forgotten, Brunner's impact on American theology is likely to continue for a long time. Key concepts such as the personal nature of revelation and faith, truth as encounter, and the christocentric understanding of the church and ethics have entered our theological consciousness (Hesselink 1989, 1171).

Brunner's contribution to the cell-church debate was to look for the renewal for the church, which he saw as free fellowship (*koinonia*) based on an idealized vision of the early church. He writes:

The New Testament Ecclesia, the fellowship of Jesus Christ, is pure communion of persons and has nothing of the character of an institution about it; The Ecclesia . . . is no institution (Brunner 1947, 107).

If the period between 1910 and 1960 saw mission discovering the church, the next twenty years saw the church discovering the world as the locus of its life and mission. The chief characteristics of the theological developments of the sixties was a series of attempts to take the secular world seriously. About this Roger Raughley wrote:

... the present theological movement may be seen in terms of an exciting consensus which appears to be forming on the nature of the church vis-à-vis the world. 'The church against the world' emphasis of twenty or thirty years back is now being radically questioned and

superseded by a far more positive appreciation of the secular and the cultural, and on explicitly Christian grounds (Raughley 1962, 248).

This altered conception of the world had its counterpart in a changed understanding of the church and its mission. Theologians began to ask if there was something profoundly secular, and by no means simply 'religious', about the Gospel itself. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once described his theological task as "giving a non-religious interpretation to Biblical ideas." Since 1960, a radical shift in ecclesiological thinking has taken place with the church as an institution promoting 'religion' and 'human religiousness' coming under criticism. The new emphasis on the world challenged the hitherto church-centric view of mission that had been developing in the International Missionary Council and the ecumenical movement in general. According to Johannes Aagaard, a Danish missiologist, "Churchism in missiology disappeared in the sixties like dew before the sun" (Aagaard 1993, 217). For such a development, the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and J. C. Hoekendijk in Europe, and of M.M. Thomas and some others in Asia, was decisive.

Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) executed by the Nazis in 1945 for his resistance to Hitler, was a gifted Protestant theologian. His letters and papers from prison had a great influence on theological thinking in the western world. He spoke of the world as having come of age. "The world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God than the world before its coming of age" (Bonhoeffer 1954, 28). For Bonhoeffer, to live in Christ meant to be a church which existed, not for the pious faithful, but for others. M. M. Thomas (1916-1996) was the most well known Indian Christian thinker in this century. He was the moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1968-1975. In his writings and speeches, he stressed the importance of the secular for the wholeness of the church's life and mission. According to Thomas, the church is not a sphere of existence distinct and separate from the natural world and history. The church is none other than the secular, which knows its true reality in the new age inaugurated by Christ. The church is the world, which knows itself to be in Christ, under the judgment and the grace of the crucified and risen Christ. In contrast to those who would build the community of faith as a heaven in the midst of secular society, Thomas spoke of the church consisting primarily of lay persons doing their secular jobs and witnessing to the true life of the secular. He spoke of the lay vocation as the basis for the vocation of the ordained ministry, and the

theologian as the articulator of the theological insights of lay people as they seek to relate themselves as believers to the lay world (Thomas 1990, 126).

Reflecting on the meaning of the revolutionary events that were taking place in Asia after the Second World War, Thomas and his colleagues in Asia, brought into the ecumenical thinking their conviction that God, somehow, is at work in the secular events of our time beyond the boundaries of the church. In his address to the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC in 1961, Thomas spoke of Christ being present in the world of today engaged in a continuous dialogue with the peoples and nations. "It is a foolish and mad idea", he said, "to think that Christ works only through the Church or Christian people. In fact the Church and the world have the same center, Jesus Christ, it is therefore impossible to confine the work of Christ in or through the Church" (ibid, 43).

Johannes C. Hoekendijk (1912-1975) from Holland was a missionary in Indonesia and later a mission board secretary and theological professor. A Dutch scholar, Hoekendijk wrote a serious critique on the German missiologists in light of World War II (Richardson 2003, 40).<sup>12</sup> While Secretary for Evangelism of the World Council of Churches from 1949-52, he was closely involved in theological discussions in the ecumenical movement and contributed much to its thinking. Hoekendijk was a vehement critic of the church-centric view of mission. In his thinking, the world and the Kingdom of God (Gospel) are correlated. The Kingdom of God is destined for the world. The world is the field in which the seeds of the Kingdom are sown—the scene of the proclamation of God. The *kerygma* of the early Christians did not know of a redemptive act of God which was not directed to the whole world. In the New Testament, the world as a unity is confronted with the Kingdom (Hoekendijk 1966, 333). In his scheme, it is God-World-Church and not God-Church-World. He wrote:

As soon as we speak of God, we are also bringing into speech the world as God's theatre stage for his action, and it is foremost the Church who knows it and who will respect it. As

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<sup>12</sup>During World War II, Hans Hoekendijk lived in Amsterdam, where he and his friends hid Jewish children from the Nazis. The Nazis caught Hans and his friends and locked them in a railroad car that rolled on toward a death camp in Germany. "One morning the train suddenly stopped. The doors were opened. The prisoners were told to climb out and lined up alongside the railroad tracks. They assumed they were in Germany. They thought they were going to be shot, but they were in Switzerland. Someone had thrown a switch and now they were free." From then on, for the rest of his life, Hans has kept asking the question, "What do you do with such a gift?"

soon as the Church acknowledges God, she also admits her own implicitly eccentric position, hoping that at some point in time it may come true that she can serve as an instrument to honor the world's worth and destiny. The eccentric Church cannot insist on protecting its own structures. She does not possess a private sociology; rather she uses - purely functionally - all available worldly structures in so far as they are useable (Thomas 1990, 125-192).

Hoekendijk advocated that, instead of thinking of apostolate as a function of the church, we should think of the church as a function of the apostolate.

The missionary movement was very slow in recognizing the importance of the secular world in its thinking. By Willingen (1952) there were signs of a change. The Willingen Conference in its report on 'The Missionary Calling of the Church' called the churches to be in solidarity with the world. It said that the church's words and works, its whole life of mission, are to be a witness to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ.

But this word 'witness' cannot possibly mean that the Church stands over against the world, detached from it and regarding it from a position of superior righteousness or security. The Church is in the world, as the Lord of the Church identified Himself wholly with mankind, so must the Church also do. The nearer the Church draws to its Lord the nearer it draws to the world. Christians do not live in an enclave separated from the world, they are God's people in the world (Goodall 1968, 188-192).

The Conference went on to say:

There the Church is required to identify itself with the world, not only in its perplexity and distress, its guilt and its sorrow, but also in its real acts of love and justice - acts by which it often puts the Churches to shame. The Church must confess that they have often passed on by the other side while the unbeliever, moved by compassion, did what the Churches ought to have done. Whenever the Church denies its solidarity with the world, or divorces its deeds from its word, it destroys the possibility of communicating the Gospel and presents to the



world an offence which is not the genuine offence of the cross (Ibid, 191).

Willingen stressed the need to discern the signs of the times, the need to see the hand of God in the great events of our day, "in the vast enlargement of human knowledge and the power which this age is witnessing, in the mighty political and social movements of our time, and in the countless personal experiences of which the inner history cannot be revealed until the last day" (Ibid, 192).

The new missiological thinking may be stated succinctly in the following way. The old adage was—there is no salvation outside the church. The modernistic idea in mission has turned this around to say that there remains no salvation inside the church, for there people are complacent and self-satisfied. We must go out into the world and become the church for the world. It must join the suffering of this world, and share people's suffering, becoming partners with them of the suffering of God in the world. David Bosch speaks most clearly of a new paradigm, that is, a new world and life view with respect to missions.<sup>13</sup> Mission does not flow from the west to the rest of the world's nations and is replaced by a complex grid of interchanges and flow lines going in every direction (Bosch 1991, 349ff). As Leslie Newbigin puts it:

It is no longer a matter of the simple command to go to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel where it has not been heard. In every nation there are already Christian believers.... The missionary calling is thus merged (or dissolved) into the general obligation of all Christians everywhere to fight injustice, challenge evil, and side with the oppressed (Cited in Phillips and Coote 1993,2).

#### **1.4 Pioneer studies of People Movements in India in the 1930's**

"It has been scientifically demonstrated by renowned missionaries of our time that the church of Jesus Christ around the world grows most rapidly by multipersonal conversions in group movements rather than by individual conversions in isolation" (Kasdorf 1980, 116). In the Foreword to J. Waskom Pickett's, *Christian Mass Movements in India*, John R. Mott, then

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<sup>13</sup> Bosch follows the model of Thomas S. Kuhn, which he introduced in his book, *the Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (second enlarged edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Hans Küng applied Kuhn's model to theology in general, and Bosch in turn applied it to missiology (see David J. Bosch, "Vision for Mission" *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 76, No. 301 (January, 1987) 8-15).

chairman of the International Missionary Council, states, “The Christian mass movements in India constitute a significant phenomenon in the non-Christian world – an extensive and impressive effort for the social and religious uplift of depressed multitudes” (Pickett 1933, 5). He points out that not less than eighty percent of the one million eight hundred thousand Protestants in India as well as one-half of all Roman Catholics in that country were the product of mass movements (ibid, 5). Nixon describes a particular event that took place during a mass movement in India. “From there he (Everett) proceeded to the Sialkot Convention held in the center of a mass movement numbering some 500,000 Christians” (Nixon 1985, 183). More significant than mere statistics, these movements represented substantial cultural transformation as well. “The transformation they have wrought afford a compelling present-day evidence of Christianity. It would be difficult to overstate the faith-kindling power of this modern apologetic” (Pickett 1933, 5).

Donald McGavran sheds further light on the importance of these movements in India as he indicates the uneven distribution of the growth pattern in Protestant churches in Mid-India, which in 1931 totaled approximately fifty-eight thousand persons scattered in Christian communities throughout the area (Pickett, Warnshuis, Singh and McGavran 1956, ix). In one hundred thirty four of the one hundred forty five mission stations reporting work in Mid-India in 1931, the decadal growth rate of membership increase for 1921-1931 was only twelve percent, a rate less than that of the normal rate of population growth. However, in eleven of the one hundred forty five stations, the decadal rate of membership increase for the same period was a remarkable two hundred percent (ibid, ix). Indications were that the mode of growth in the one hundred thirty four stagnant stations was biological increase; whereas, the growth of the eleven other stations was through adult conversions from the non-Christian community.<sup>14</sup>

Neither missionaries nor national church leaders at the time were aware of the importance of these findings. Since the eleven rapidly growing stations were situated in more remote regions, their increases were basically unknown to persons working in other area causing missionary leaders to conclude that the growth rate of their churches was necessarily slow. Church and missionary leaders began to seriously question why after three hundred years of missionary effort less than one-sixtieth of the Indian population of roughly three hundred fifty million had responded to the Christian Gospel (Pickett 1938, 5). Another question to be considered was

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<sup>14</sup> That is, through baptisms of the children of those already Christians and church members.

why the eight denominational mission groups working in Mid-India at the time were devoting only twenty five percent of their total field budgets to evangelistic work over against seventy five percent committed to institutional work or the support of small mission-station churches that were producing only minimal evangelistic results (ibid, 675).

The answer to these questions and others like them appeared directly related to the increasingly controversial issue of mass movements but not all missionaries working in India were familiar with or understood the principles of group-oriented conversions, and a majority of those who did were more concerned with the potential problems of the movements than their significant achievements. They assumed people movements to be superficial and not representative of genuine individual conversion. Additional concern was expressed that the decisions of castes to seek Christianity as their faith were more socially and economically motivated rather than religiously oriented, and that they would result in a nominal Christianity once members' physical needs were met. Connected to this was fear that the real needs of individuals in the mass movements were being ignored with the major attention focused on "group" decisions. Another concern was that the rapid influx of thousands of lower castes might damage the public "image" of the Church, thereby seriously hampering efforts to reach the higher and more desirable castes, from whom many believed a "stable" Indian Church would eventually have to evolve.

Stated succinctly, many mission leaders had serious misgivings about the validity of people movement strategy. They hesitated to commit themselves to seek mass movements and opted instead to emphasize the necessity of separate and individual commitments of faith without regard to the overall response of the "group," but the very numerical record forced the missionary leaders to press for further understanding of the situation despite their misgivings (Dubois 1963, 15-17).

In December of 1928, the National Christian Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon met in Madras<sup>15</sup> and held a prolonged debate concerning mass or people movements. One major outcome of the discussion was the appointment of Jarrel

Waskom Pickett as director of an in-depth research of the mass movements toward Christianity among five major castes in middle India. The castes and areas included were: 1) The Telegu work in the Kistna District of the Madras Presidency; 2) The Tamil work in South Travancore; 3) The Hindi work in Chota Nagpur; 4) The Urdu work in the Western United Provinces;

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<sup>15</sup> The official designation by the Indian government for Madras today is Chennai.

and 5) The Punjabi work in the Punjab. The director expressed regret that four major language areas where movements had occurred would be omitted: the Gujarati, Kanarese, Malayalam, and Marathi (Pickett 1933, 15). Associated with Pickett in the initial survey were, namely, V. S. Azariah<sup>16</sup>, J. Z. Hodge,<sup>17</sup> and Warren Wilson.<sup>18</sup>

Pickett published in 1933, *Christian Mass Movements in India*, as a result of the research in which he gave a systematic account of the survey findings accompanied by recommendations for facilitating people-movements. This was the first critical survey of Christian people movements ever made in India and became the standard work of its kind for missiological study. Donald McGavran said of the book:

It marked a turning point in mission history. To leaders convinced that Christianization is necessarily a very slow and difficult process, Dr. Pickett's accounts of the triumphs of the Gospel and of its redemptive power in areas where men had accepted it in the people-movement fashion caused a revolution in thinking. Leaders realized that while much of Mid-India seemed sterile, still there were occurring and had occurred numerous group conversions similar in nature to the movements that led to the establishment of the great Churches in Chhota Nagpur and the Andhra country (Pickett, Warnshuis, Singh and McGavran 1956, ix-x).

In spite of recurring difficulties in people movements in terms of reactions, breakdowns, lapses, and disappointments,<sup>19</sup> the survey revealed a truly remarkable achievement of mass evangelism among the lowest of India's most depressed lower castes. As Pickett investigated the movements, he discovered that the numerical aspect was only the beginning of the movements' significance. The most remarkable phenomenon was the transformation that had taken place in the spiritual experience of the

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<sup>16</sup> Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (1874-1945) was leader of the most successful grassroots movement toward Christianity in South Asia during the early twentieth century. He was the first and only Indian national to serve as bishop of an Anglican diocese, and he did so from 1912 until his death in 1945. "As both an effective evangelist to Indian villagers and a respected bishop in the British church hierarchy, Azariah provided a unique bridge between ordinary Indians and British elites during the last phase of their imperial association. He was equally at home with the 'untouchables' of rural India and the unreachable of the British Empire" (Harper 2000, 1).

<sup>17</sup> General Secretary of the National Christian Council.

<sup>18</sup> Warren H. Wilson was an experienced American administrator in connection with rural programs.

<sup>19</sup> Most of these were due, not to the movement itself, but rather to inadequate leadership training and development.

majority of persons involved in the mass movements - a transformation that was evident in their lives and was visibly enriching their communities. Pickett could see immediate application from the study for mission efforts in other countries such as China, Siam, Japan, Korea, the Dutch Indies, and parts of Africa, with the development of ever-increasing people-group movements of homogenous groups coming to faith in Jesus Christ constituting the most powerful challenge and missionary opportunity in the world.

Additional outbreaks of mass movements<sup>20</sup> soon after the publication of his first book convinced the National Christian Council to request Pickett to undertake a second survey covering all of India. This survey is described in his book, *Christ's Way to India's Heart* (Pickett 1938, 8). The Mid-India Provincial Christian Council authorized Pickett to conduct still further research into the possibility of church growth in Mid-India. G. H. Singh and Donald McGavran were asked to serve as his assistants, and the joint research was first published in 1936 under the title, *Christian Missions in Mid-India* (Pickett, Wanshuis, Singh, and McGavran 1956, x). A second edition appeared in 1938 with a Foreword by John R. Mott. The third edition, condensed but including a chapter by A. L. Warnshuis, was published in 1956 under the title, *Church Growth and Group Conversion*. Together, these three works<sup>21</sup> have served as a foundation for understanding people movements and the group-conversion mode of evangelization. Of McGavran's ideas, Bishop Leslie Newbigin writes:

Dr. McGavran's convictions were developed out of his experience in India, where he observed that some churches were multiplying rapidly while others in similar situations stagnated. He saw that these contrasting experiences resulted from contrasting missionary methods. On the one hand was the method centered on the 'mission station.' (Since 'mission' means going and 'station' means standing still, one might think that 'mission station' was the perfect contradiction in terms. It has been, nevertheless, the central element in the program of missions during most of the modern period.) In the 'mission station' approach, as McGavran sees it, converts are detached from the natural communities to which they belong, attached to the foreign mission and its institutions, and required to conform to ethical and cultural standards that belong to the Christianity of the foreign missionary.

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<sup>20</sup> These additional mass movements brought in approximately forty thousand believers from some forty-eight castes.

<sup>21</sup> i.e. *Christian Mass Movements in India*, *Christ's Way to India's Heart*, and *Church Growth and Group Conversion*.

The effect of this policy is twofold. On the one hand the convert, having been transplanted into an alien culture, is no longer in position to influence non-Christian relatives and neighbors; on the other hand the energies of the mission are exhausted in the effort to bring the converts, or more often their children, into conformity with the standards supposed by the missionaries to be required by the gospel. Both factors have the effect of stopping the growth of the church.

By contrast, the strategy of 'people's movement' actively seeks and fosters the corporate decisions of whole social groups to accept the gospel. This avoids the breaking of natural relationships... Churches that are the products of such people's movements tend to grow, and in fact the great majority of those who have become Christians from among the non-Christian religions have come this way.

Like many earlier missiologists, McGavran draws attention to the fact that the Great Commission includes the command to 'disciple the nations.' The implication is that those who are to become disciples are not individuals considered in isolation, but human beings whose nationhood is part of their being. The gospel, therefore, is to be addressed to the whole community, since the real human life of its people is bound up inextricably with the language and culture of the whole. There is a strong tradition in German missiology that has laid great emphasis on this. Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), generally regarded as the founder of Protestant missiology, insisted that the ties that hold society together should as far as possible be preserved and that the aim should be the conversion and baptism of whole communities rather than of individuals. The great work of Christian Keysser (1877-1961) in the highlands of New Guinea was based on the principle of 'tribal conversion,' according to which the whole community is brought to the point of accepting Christianity, and only after this are individual members baptized. In this way everything possible is done to avoid the disruption of the culture and social organization of the people" (Newbigin 1995, 140-141).

## **1.5 A Theoretical Definition of Church Planting Movement Strategy**

### **1.5.1 Distinction between “mass movement” and “people movement”**

The first task in establishing a working definition of church planting movement strategy is clarifying nomenclature. Part of the confusion existing among some missionary strategists and administrators concerning Church Planting Movement strategy, arises from the terminology itself and its relationship to previously used terms, such as “mass movements” and “people movements.”

In investigating the church growth phenomenon in middle India in the 1930's, it became necessary to either find or create an adequate vocabulary that would facilitate technical discussion and evaluation. Pickett used the term “mass movement” because it so clearly described what he had observed. Literally thousands from among the scheduled castes were moving toward Christ and bringing their families and close friends with them. The term “mass movement” referred to the observable fact that regardless of whatever principles might be at work, great masses of people were in fact responding to the gospel of Christ.

Since that time, the term ‘mass’ has fallen into disfavor, especially in the Western world, implying a shallow and relatively meaningless response made by an undiscerning multitude of people with no individual transformation. To some degree this negative connotation comes from the intensive use of “mass media” (including newspapers, periodicals, radio, television, etc.) to present a barrage of persuasive propaganda designed to elicit “mass response” to a variety of vested interests, i.e. businesses seeking mass commercialization, politicians seeking mass indoctrination, and even preachers seeking mass evangelization.

Use of the term “people movement” was an attempt to further clarify the missiological principles at stake in the concept. An example is the following by S. Devasagayam Ponraj from his small book, *Church Growth Studies in Mission*:

When we study Bishop Pickett's writings we understand that most of the Christians in South India, North East India and Chota Nagpur region came to Christ through people movements. This method was termed “mass movement” although Bishop Pickett

himself did not propose this term. Later on others also felt that such a term was misleading to the reality of what takes place in such a movement to Christ. It is not just “masses” but “people” who decide to follow Christ. It is a group of people who move into the Church with a common commitment to follow Christ and is rightly termed a “people movement.” This subject is relevant and important in an Indian context more than anywhere else in the world and needs to be correctly understood (Ponraj 1991, 9).

With this problem of semantics in mind, it becomes critical to distinguish mass-movements from the idea of people movements. Whereas mass movements speak of numbers, people movements speak of methodology. The former implies quantity regardless of quality; the latter insists upon quality as essential to the process of obtaining quantity. McGavran differentiates between the two by pointing out that where the one term has primary reference to “the number of persons involved,” the other is primarily descriptive of a “mode of action” (Pickett, Warnshuis, Singh, and McGavran 1956, 4). In the term “mass movement,” the emphasis may well be upon the fact that a multitude of persons is involved in making a simultaneous response, without regard to the object toward which they move or the quality of their response.

Alan Tippett cautions that the term “mass movement” is indistinct and potentially misleading when applied to the subject of people movements, because the “mass” connotation “envisages a fearful, hysterical crowd acting as an irrational mass” (Tippett 1971, 199). Such an image of hysteria of irrationality does injustice to the concept of people movements as acceptable missionary strategy. Mass movements in religion tend to follow one of two extremes, either that of “irresponsible emotion” or that of “unintelligent imitation,” both of which are unacceptable in Christian evangelization. At times mass movements are the result of emotional and psychological manipulation.<sup>22</sup> In such cases, there is superficial response by a large number of people under the tension of a provocative atmosphere, the volatility of the present moment, without necessarily resulting in any depth of genuine spiritual understanding, true conviction, or any enduring quality of commitment. At other times, a mass movement is the result of a multitude of people merely taking on the name “Christian” out of desire for gain or out of respect, desire for emulation, or

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<sup>22</sup> A case in point would be certain large-scale Christian meetings in which throngs of people make an impressive show of response but somehow never follow through with responsible Christian discipleship and church membership.



passive obedience to their political or social leader, without any true discernment of the spiritual implications or ethical demands.

Neither of these two extremes have any necessary correlation with the missiological concept of people movement strategy; therefore, it is essential in any discussion of people-movement strategy to emphasize that it “(a) is not one of mere mass, but always of people (tribe, caste, or clan); (b) usually enlarges by the conversion of small, well-instructed groups; and (c) achieves large numbers only over a period of years” (Pickett, Warnshuis, Singh, and McGavran 1956, 4).

As McGavran elaborates, the key elements are movement through homogenous units, adequate instruction to ensure meaningful participation by each individual, and the eventual attainment of largeness as group upon group make their collective commitment and add the strength of their collective influence to make it easier for other similar groups to follow (McGavran 1955, 13).

### 1.5.2 A working definition of people movement strategy

The individual who has done the most to clarify terminology as well as explain the theory of people movements is the late Donald McGavran.<sup>23</sup> One finds when searching available literature on the subject of people movements in missions that there are numerous authors who have written on this theme, each having some qualification in his or her own field and some particular contribution to make to this subject. However, one inevitably

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<sup>23</sup> Donald Anderson McGavran was born on December 15, 1897, in Damoh, India, the son and grandson of missionaries. He returned with his parents to the United States in 1910, and grew up in Michigan, Oklahoma, and Indiana. He was married on August 29, 1922, to Mary Elizabeth Howard, and together they raised six children. McGavran served in the US Army in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade during World War II from 1917 – 1919. In 1919, during a YMCA conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, McGavran dedicated his life to going where God sent and carrying out God’s will. In 1923, Donald and Mary were commissioned as missionaries of the United Christian Missionary Society (the missions arm of the Disciples of Christ) and sailed to India. The McGavrans served in India until 1954. It was in that year that the McGavrans were sent by their mission to various parts of the world to do further research into the growth of churches planted by the mission and related Christian groups. He began to teach and write extensively about the theories he had developed during his time in India about the factors that influence and shape the development of congregations and these theories were to be the dominant theme of his writings and educational work from this time on. Starting in 1961, they were to have an enormous influence not only on the way Protestant Evangelicals did missions, but on their understanding of church life in general. In 1965, McGavran was the founding dean of the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he served until retirement in 1981. He remained active as a speaker and writer until shortly before his death on July 10, 1990, in Altadena, California, of cancer. Mary McGavran preceded Donald in death on April 5, 1990 (Billy Graham Center Archives, Papers of Donald Anderson and Mary Elizabeth McGavran – Collection 178, Wheaton, Illinois).

finds that for the basic terminology and statement of people-movement strategy and theory, every modern author instinctively reaches for one of the basic books by McGavran and either quotes him directly or simply reshuffles his ideas and paraphrases them. Thus, it is primarily McGavran's original works to which one turns most readily to establish a working definition of people-movement strategy, including (1) the basic inquiry of people-movement theory; (2) the sociological basis upon which people-movement theory is founded; (3) the model by which it operates; and (4) the goal toward which it is directed.

### 1.5.3 The Basic Inquiry of People Movement Theory

McGavran's, *The Bridges of God*, contains the most comprehensive single treatment of the subject of people-movement theory extant. McGavran states his purpose as the discovery of ways individuals within each segment of a given society may become Christians in a community with others of their own kinship and social group, thereby sharing the joys and blessings of God's Kingdom within their own natural social identity and without unnecessary disruption:

This book asks how clans, tribes, castes, in short how Peoples become Christian. Every nation is made up of various layers or strata of society. In many nations each stratum is clearly separated from every other. The individuals in each stratum intermarry chiefly, if not solely, with each other. Their intimate life is therefore limited to their own society, that is, to their own people. They may work with others, they may buy from and sell to the individuals of other societies, but their intimate life is wrapped up with the individuals of their own people. Individuals of one stratum, possibly close neighbors, may become Christians or Communists without that stratum being much concerned. But when individuals of their own kind start becoming Christians, that touches their very lives. How do chain reactions in these strata of society begin? How do Peoples become Christian? This is an enquiry which is of enormous concern to both the younger and older churches as they carry out the Great Commission (McGavran 1955, 1-2).

#### 1.5.4 The sociological basis upon which People Movement Theory is based

The sociological basis upon which people movement theory is based is the observable fact that all persons, especially those belonging to the communal systems of the Two-Thirds World, live within homogenous units or segments of society in which their most intimate life is shared and in which the majority of their character and beliefs are formed. The purpose of people movement theory is to better understand the way persons within such natural and universal groupings can become disciples of Jesus Christ, so that rather than being extracted from their group and creating division within it, they can share that discipleship with others in a community of experience that transforms the entire group. McGavran explains the sociological basis in *How Churches Grow*:

Except in individualized, urbanized, homogenous populations, men and women exist in social organisms such as tribes, castes, and kindreds. They have an intense people-consciousness and tribal loyalty. Churchmen holding Gathered Church convictions proclaim a universal Gospel to them and invite them as individuals, regardless of what others do, to choose Christ. To them this sounds like being urged to leave their own and join the Christian "tribe". It is as if Brahmans from India were asked to join Negro Churches in South Africa, knowing that their children would inevitably inter-marry with Negroes. "Becoming a Christian" to race-conscious tribes and castes seems more a racial than a religious matter. When, in order to espouse the Christian Faith an individual has traitorously to leave his own race the Church grows slowly. The social organism resists Christianity and heavily penalizes any of its members who breaks away and accepts the invading truth. Second, undisciplined peoples best become Christians through group conversions and people movements. When conditions are right groups of some people start to accept Christianity. Men become Christians with their families and kinship groups. Many groups, each carefully instructed, across the months and years come into the Church. In a few years or decades the population becomes largely or entirely Christian. It has been disciplined (McGavran 1966, 23-24).

Alan Tippett has added significant analysis of the sociological structures underlying people movements. He states:

Why populations, one may ask, why populations and not persons? In this context the word populations directs one to the non-Western world of extended families, clans, tribes, castes and age-grades, where whole villages may represent precise ethnic entities, and where such groups may elect to turn from animism to Christianity as total units at one precise point of time. This kind of religious movement may be positive toward Christianity or negative away from it. For purposes of differentiation we may describe the former as a people movement and the latter as a nativistic movement. Spiritually they are direct opposites, but psychologically they comprise almost identical dynamics. When we speak of “responsive populations” we are thinking of large homogeneous units of people who, once they have made their decision, act in unison (Tippett 1971, 77-78).

If culture truly is shared and learned behavior as defined by most anthropologists, by its very definition, culture is a group product. Goldschmidt (1971:286) has suggested three reasons why humans live in groups. The first is the long period of physical and social maturation required by humans. The second is the psychological need for companionship. This is so strong that isolation or solitary confinement is used as punishment. The third is the relative physical weakness of human beings. They are ill equipped without such physical helps as claws, tusks, and hoofs. By cooperation humans control stronger, quicker, and more dangerous animals than themselves and tame many aspects of the environment (Grunlan and Mayers 1988, 179-80).

Grunlan and Mayers define a group as “a unit possessing the following five properties: (1) it consists of two or more people; (2) there is interaction or communication between the people; (3) there are one or more symbolic objects present; (4) each person has some kind of relation or orientation toward other persons and toward one or more symbolic objects; and (5) there is ‘unit awareness’” (ibid, 180). The interaction between group members involves interactive communication of information within a social setting, and behavior that affects and is affected by other members of the group. Another helpful distinction sociologists and anthropologists make is between primary and secondary groups. “The *primary group* refers to a group that is small, intimate, and informal. The family is an excellent example of a primary group. . . . The *secondary group* refers to groups that are utilitarian, formal, and impersonal.

School classes, student bodies, labor unions, and PTAs are examples of secondary groups. A person's primary group associations are usually more important than his secondary associations" (ibid, 180-81). Group interaction may be described in still more complex ways by referring to *mutually exclusive groups* and *overlapping groups*, which may be divided into *inclusive* and *non-inclusive groups*.

Groups are to be understood in their relationship to community. India contains over five hundred thousand villages. In these villages live approximately seven out of ten Indian citizens, about one out of every seven human beings in the world. Indian villages are inventive and conservative, tall and short, friendly and quarrelsome, handsome and ugly, wise and foolish, radical and reactionary. There are no typical rural Indians; there are no typical Indian villages. There are only human beings living in some relationship to the complex pattern of forces and ideas that constitute the civilization of India. To understand a single village and the people in it is to begin to understand India, but it is not more than a beginning (ibid, 184).

A community is an interrelated body sharing sociopolitical identity. The household is one type of community and may, in a given society, serve as a community itself. This aspect of "household" within the overall group structure will be critical in our discussion later concerning a biblical foundation for church planting movement strategy.

#### 1.5.5 The model by which People Movement Theory operates

As stated earlier, people movements are simply those in which people become Christians in groups. "In strong group-oriented tribes, all major decisions, such as marriage, migration, raiding, and use of land, are made by a family, lineage, or tribe acting as a whole. It should not surprise us that people decide to become Christians in groups" (Hiebert 1995, 159). McGavran described the people-movement "group conversion" experience in terms of "a wave of decision" sweeping through the group mind and affecting each individual:

Peoples become Christian as a wave of decision for Christ sweeps through the group mind, involving many individual decisions but being far more than merely their sum. This may be called a chain reaction. Each decision sets off others and the sum total powerfully affects every individual. When conditions are right, not merely each

sub-group, but the entire group concerned decides together (McGavran 1955, 12-13).

Perhaps the most frequently quoted statement in all of people-movement literature is McGavran's description of the model found in *Understanding Church Growth*:

What really happens in people movements is that relatively small, well-instructed groups—one this month and one several months later—become Christians. Numbers are achieved to be sure, but usually only with the passage of the years. . . . A people movement results from the joint decision of individuals—whether five or five hundred—all from the same people, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other groups of that people, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of that people (McGavran 1970, 297-298).

Burkhalter notes substantial similarity between the missiologies of Donald McGavran and Roland Allen:

Principles of missionary practice occupied a major portion of the missiologies of both Allen and McGavran. This was the case because both were concerned to heighten the effectiveness of the missionary force. Neither Allen nor McGavran developed his missiology with the primary goal of increasing the understanding of the theology of missions. Both contributed to the theology of missions, but the primary purpose of their missiologies was to develop principles of missionary practice which could aid in the growth of the church.

A significant degree of similarity existed between Allen's understanding of the spontaneous expansion of the church and McGavran's notion of the people movement. Indeed, McGavran saw people movements as the context in which the spontaneous expansion of the church could best occur.... Though the concepts of spontaneous expansion and of people movements are certainly not identical, they do fit well together (Burkhalter 1984, 235-237).

Other authors have contributed their own versions of the model in its basic form. S. D. Ponraj defines a people group as "a large number of individuals who have close relationship and sympathies with (affinity for) one another because of a common origin, such as tribe, race, ethnicity, as well as common culture which would include language,

religion, occupation, etc.” (Ponraj 1991, 9). Ponraj gives as examples of people groups in India the fifty thousand Tamil-speaking mill workers of Ahmedabad city, the eighty-five thousand Telugu-speaking railway workshop employees of Kharagpur city, and the five thousand Mangada dialect-speaking bamboo basket weavers settled in South Gujarat—all large people groups with close ties of race as well as culture, common linguistic and occupational bonds, as well as common geographical locations (ibid, 9). He goes on to apply the model to the evangelization of India:

Indians are generally “people conscious” and for that reason individuals closely identify with others who share a common origin or interest. The Indian rural society is solidly founded on two deeply-rooted institutions: one is the family and the other is the community or the village; these institutions do play an important part in the growth of the church through people movement. Such movements are the logical outcome of these institutions and it is both natural and inevitable that people who had lived all their lives as members of a group, should move towards Christianity along the same lines. . . .A people movement is a group of related people making the decision to follow Christ. They are related to each other either in culture, language, tribe, or community and they want to maintain this socio-cultural relationship even when making the decision to follow Christ and want to continue the relationship even after baptism. It is not an “impersonal” action. Rather it is an individual as part of the group making the decision in close understanding and mutual agreement with the entire group (ibid, 9-10).

To illustrate the model and its significance for the Church in India, Ponraj quotes a leader of a scheduled caste as to his desire to come to the church with his community and his frustration when the Church failed to receive them:

I am a Chamar (leather-worker). There are millions of us. We have been badly abused in Hinduism, starved, insulted and despised. We are ignorant, crude, cruel and dirty. We live in hovels. But we must change. Our children must have a different sort of life. You Christians have what we need, the right kind of religion. It works now for a few of our people. Some who have come to know Christ have proved the Chamars can be as good and as smart as any people, but You are too slow. We cannot wait. By your program it would take

generations for all our people to be rescued. We will have to find a quicker way (ibid, 13).

Pickett sums up the model in one of the briefest and simplest definitions of all, but it expresses the passion of the Christian evangelist. He suggests that people movements provide a mode of Christianization “by which *groups of men, maintaining their social integration* may obtain release from sin and find abundant life” (Pickett, Earnshuis, Singh, and McGavran 1956, 35).

#### 1.5.6 The goal toward which People Movement Strategy is directed

McGavran and others writing about people-movement theory and strategy are not merely developing a theory for the sake of theorizing. Primarily, they are mission strategists whose purpose is to translate theory into practice and connect it to the goal of seeing unreached people groups become disciples of Jesus Christ within their own cultural and sociological frameworks. McGavran states in *Bridges of God* that the day of communicating through introverted and institutionalized missionary establishments should give way to a fresh effort to pour all available resources into responsive areas of receptive peoples, among whom indigenous people movements could be encouraged and nurtured. He stresses there are not enough resources of men and money to meet all of the world’s needs, and that the Christian Church must focus its priority on establishing churches among the many responsive segments of peoples. All other endeavor should be secondary to this goal and should emerge out of it in proper perspective. He states his goal as follows:

The era has come when Christian Missions should hold lightly all mission station work, which cannot be proved to nurture growing churches, and should support the Christ-ward movements within Peoples as long as they continue to grow at a rate of fifty per cent per decade or more. This is today’s strategy. By “growing churches” we do not mean churches which are primarily recruited through the one-by-one process. As long as accessions from the non-Christians are one-by-one, from different levels in society, and result in no People Movement, any considerable growth will be rare and, even when achieved, temporary. Such a system can operate successfully only in a disciplined society. By “growing churches” we mean organized cells of the movement of a people. Folk join these cells by conversion



without social dislocation, without entering a new marriage market, and without a sense that “we are leaving and betraying our kindred.” Of this kind of caste-wise, tribe-wise, clan-wise or people-wise movements there are now enough so that the entire resources of Christian Missions should be poured into them and they would still be able to absorb more. If we revert to the analogy of the bridges across a gorge, separating a land of plenty from a land of scarcity, we may say that the building of approaches to future bridges by each mission station should now cease because there are enough bridges already built to give access to most parts of the land of scarcity (McGavran 1955, 109-110).

## **1.6 Church Planting Movements defined in light of People-Movement Strategy**

The International Mission Board Overseas Leadership Team adopted as its vision statement in 1998: “We will facilitate the lost coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ by beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements among all peoples” (Garrison 1999, 7). The introduction of a new term, namely “Church Planting Movements,” was in keeping with recognition that “God has revealed some remarkable breakthroughs in evangelism and church planting that are happening in some of the most unexpected corners of our globe. In these situations, evangelism is resulting in rapidly multiplying churches in a phenomenal way that is vastly outstripping population-growth rates” (Office of Overseas Operations 1999, 14). An example is given from work in India among a Hindu people group. According to the Office of Overseas Operations of the International Mission Board:

Initial evangelism and church planting began among them in the early 19th century. However, 170 years later there were still only 28 churches among this population of 90 million people. Furthermore, progress in reaching the people had ceased, with no new churches planted among them in over 40 years. Over the last few years, however, things have changed radically. Between 1989 and 1991 eight new churches were suddenly started in this formerly stagnant setting. By 1994, the number of churches had grown to 78, the following year to more than 220, a year later to 547! Then by 1997 there were more than 1,000 new churches among this predominantly Hindu population. The growth rate shows no sign of slowing, as 800 new churches have

been planted in the past year. In all, a total of more than 50,000 new converts have been recorded in the decade between 1989 and 1998 (Snowden 1998, 14-15).<sup>24</sup>

Later, the same booklet (*Something New Under the Sun: New Directions at the International Mission Board*), describes the new focus of the Board as being “people groups.” “People groups refer to groups of individuals, families and clans who share a common language and ethnic identity.... Increasingly, the International Mission Board is looking at these ethnolinguistic people groups as we formulate strategies and plans of action” (IMB Office of Overseas Operations 1999, 19-20).

It appears that the International Mission Board is embracing the strategy/model that was proposed and expounded by Donald McGavran approximately forty-five years earlier. Granted, the terminology is altered (i.e. “Church Planting Movements” versus “People Movements”), but the components remain unchanged. This is alluded to in one of its own publications:

Missiologists have long noted that church-planting movements are a distinctly homogenous phenomenon. This means they tend to sweep through a common ethno- linguistic people group. Every church-planting movement we’ve identified thus far has erupted among a people who share a common language and ethnic identity (ibid, 21).

David Garrison of the International Mission Board writes in *Church Planting Movements* that a Church Planting Movement is “a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment” (Garrison 1999, 7). Compare this definition with that of

a people movement as stated by Donald McGavran in 1970:

A people movement results from the joint decision of a number of individuals all from the same people group, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other segments of that people group, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people (McGavran 1990, 223).

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<sup>24</sup> This story is described more fully in *Toward a Church Planting Movement*, ed. By Mark Snowden (Richmond: International Mission Board, 1998).

Church Planting Movement strategy actually altered the outcome of Ray Register's book on church planting. "A radical and positive shift in missiology from the theme of 'church planting' to that of 'Church Planting Movement' has impacted the final revision of this book.... They are spontaneous acts of God that can only be encouraged or impeded by the strategies and institutions of man" (Register 2000, xx).

### *A Conclusion Concerning Terminology*

It would seem a fair and accurate conclusion that a church planting movement (as observed and described by the International Mission Board's Office of Overseas Operations) is the same as a people movement (as observed and described by Donald McGavran), as well as a mass movement (as observed and described by J. Waskom Pickett). The significance of this conclusion extends beyond the mere similarity of terms. If what is currently observed and described by the International Mission Boards is the same phenomena as the one observed and described by Pickett, McGavran, and others, then missionary strategists may draw on the rich collection of case studies compiled by these as they consider ways to initiate and facilitate church planting movements among unreached people groups of the world.

## **1.7 Some major technical themes in Church Planting Movement Strategy**

Within the broad perspective of church planting movement strategy, there are at least three major themes that need careful examination, including the concepts of evangelization within homogenous units or segments in people-conscious societies, evangelization by the principle of group-conversion in communal societies, and evangelization through kinship webs in extended-family integrated societies. While these themes may be discussed separately theoretically, they may not be separated from one another in practice.

### **1.7.1 Evangelization within homogeneous units or segments in People-Conscious Societies**

The modern missionary movement has tended to see the missionary endeavor as simply "preaching the Gospel to a lost world"—a world that has all too often been regarded as being broad groups or nations—without much

attention being given to the distinctive nature or composition of that world to which the preaching was to be addressed. The unfortunate result in many instances was what McNee has termed “a foggy and ineffective mission policy and evangelistic effort” (McNee 1976, 105). Wagner suggests that the failure to recognize the distinction between the various sub-structures within a society has often been a major source of both political and missionary difficulties:

One of the most important tasks in planning missionary strategy is accurately to identify the cultures and sub- cultures of a given region. Political boundaries, such as in Africa, many times have been drawn with no sensitivity to cultural boundaries. When this is done, wars and international strife are inevitable. . . . The assumption that all who live within a certain nation share the same culture has been an obstacle to sound missionary strategy in many cases (Wagner 1971, 89).

Recognizing the historical neglect on the part of missionary strategists to seek essential understanding of the peoples among whom they worked, McGavran emphasized the relationship between sociological structure and the receptivity of peoples to the Gospel. This emphasis does not imply an effort to accomplish God’s work by “worldly” means as some have argued,<sup>25</sup> but instead provides a God-given insight into at least a portion of the way by which He accomplished His purposes. McGavran comments on the need for such sociological inquiry:

Whatever the reasons, a clear-cut recognition of the fragmented character of society, a realistic acceptance of the fact that some populations are more responsive than others, and a skilled proclamation of the Gospel to the peoples whom God has prepared, is often lacking. In investigations of church growth in many lands, we have found that recognition of the sociological matrix is a key factor. The lack of this recognition is one of the most crucial issues in church growth today (McGavran 1965, 79). It is a basic sociological fact that societies are not monolithic but are instead composed of many and varied segments. These segments have been described by McGavran and others as the “homogeneous units and sub-units” which are most nearly related to the life of each individual. McGavran’s illustration is that of a mosaic: The general population may be compared to a

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<sup>25</sup> See “Missiologiical Pitfalls in McGavran’s Theology,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (4/82).

mosaic. Each piece of the mosaic is a society, a homo-geneous unit. It has its own way of life, its own standards, degree of education, self-image, and places of residence. Even city “melting pots” on examination turn out to be a series of wards or neighborhoods, each occupied by a different homogeneous unit (ibid, 71).

Similarly, Yamamori stresses that each of these societal units is comprised of persons who have certain characteristics in common that bind them together as a “cohesive segment” and distinguish them from other societal units within the same society (Yamamori and Lawson 1975, 85). It is impossible to overstate the importance of the sub-group structure in its implications upon missionary strategy. Wold notes that, although it is rather apparent that tribal societies are more than an “amorphous mass,” it can nevertheless be a difficult matter to distinguish the sub-groups and assess their significance.

That the tribe is a homogeneous unit is obvious. Multiple sub groupings are not so obvious, but are often more significant for church growth. These smaller groupings are even more homogeneous than the tribe—that is, the members have closer ties and more attributes in common (Wold 1968, 130).

The ramifications of this strong sense of “people consciousness” among tribal peoples are significant, for the tribe or clan becomes a determining factor in the total life pattern of the individual. As McGavran notes, the tribe or clan or caste conditions the individual, it makes up his mind, to some degree it controls him. It gives meaning to his life. Among the many aspects of human society none is more important to church growth than these homogeneous units of mankind (McGavran 1955, 9).

In his work *New Patterns for Discipling Hindus*, B. V. Subbamma indicates that there is a definite relationship between the principle of homogeneous units in society and people-movement or church planting movement strategy.

While the homogeneous principle directs the Church’s attention to the existence and significance of the many groups which make up every society and warns us that the Gospel must be related to each segment of the cultural mosaic, the people-movement principle relates to the process by which homogeneous units are most likely to become Christian (Subbamma 1970, 34).

Subbamma, with specific reference to evangelizing Hindu people groups, proposes that the Christian message should never be communicated in such a way that the receiver perceives that “he should break caste, leave his social structure and thus ‘join a church,’” but instead that he is to “accept Christ as Savior and Lord, and within his own social group and among those whom he can influence personally, multiplying cells of Christian fellowship that meet the needs of daily spiritual life” (ibid, 54).

McGavran points out that there are already three inherent hindrances that must be engaged and surmounted as any person makes a full commitment to the authority of Jesus Christ in experiencing salvation, making it illogical to erect an additional barrier of social disruption simply due to ignorance of the decision-making process:

The offense of the cross is one basic barrier to becoming a Christian. To accept the truth that one is a sinner whose salvation depends not at all on what he does but entirely on his accepting what Jesus Christ has done for him on the cross, affronts his ego. To repent of one’s sins and turn from them is another basic barrier to discipleship. Openly to confess Christ before men, be baptized in His name, and join the Church is the third obstacle. To those who accept the authority of the Scriptures, these barriers must remain. But the Church and her emissaries are constantly tempted to add others (McGavran 1990, 4).

In keeping with the reality of repeated attempts to erect sociological barriers in addition to those inherent in scriptural conversion, Charles Kraft charges that the Church has never really resolved the central issues of the Jerusalem Conference of 50 A. D., with regard to the submission of Gentiles to the cultural and societal norms of the Jews as prerequisite to becoming Christians. Much modern effort is, in effect, promoting an approach to Christianity more akin to that of the first-century Judaizers than to that of Paul and Peter. It has merely substituted Western culture for Hebrew culture and the *sine qua non* for God’s acceptance of man (Kraft 1988, 183).

Therefore, missionary strategy of highest impact and lasting significance gives due recognition to the nature of social composition (i.e. people groups), the significance of homogeneous segments within the overall super-structure of society, and as well as the national processes of communication and decision-making within each of the various segments. Only then may we effectively penetrate through the barriers of social and cultural resistance.

### 1.7.2 Evangelization by the principle of group conversion in Communal Societies

While the first principle of church planting movement strategy relates to recognizing people-groupings within society, the second principle concerns the pattern by which conversion takes place within such segments of society. Donald McGavran cautions that the term “group conversion” should be used guardedly because it contains for some the connotation of a leader making the initial and only genuine conversion decision, with others in the group merely following the leader without an experience of conversion of their own. It reflects back on the same problem connected with the term, “mass movement.” In response, McGavran writes:

There is no such thing as group conversion. A group has no body and no mind. It cannot *decide* anything whatever. The phrase “group conversion” is simply an easy, inexact description of what really happens (McGavran 1990, 302).

McGavran then proceeds to explain what actually takes place in people-movement decisions; namely, that the process involves “multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversion” (ibid, 302). His term “multi-individual” describes a group of individuals taking a certain course of action in the same direction at the same time, with each person acting upon his or her own initiative but with full awareness of similar actions by other members of the group.

*Multi-individual* means that many people *participate* in the act. Each individual makes up his own mind. He hears about Jesus Christ. He debates with himself and with others whether it is a good thing to become a Christian. He believes or does not believe. If he believes, he joins those who are becoming Christian. If he does not believe, he joins those who are not becoming Christian. When in a minor matter, such as building a house, none participate except those who have decided they will help, how much more will only those abandon their old gods and become Christian who have individually and personally decided that they will do so (ibid, 302-303).

In group decisions to embrace Christianity, not everyone wants to become a Christian. Some agree to the group decision on the basis of maintaining group unity rather than a desire on their part to “convert.” Hiebert acknowledges this and offers the following explanation:

We should allow the dynamics of group decisions to take their course. The initial decision is not so much a decision by all to follow Christ as it is to explore Christianity further. The community wants to know more about the gospel. It is imperative, therefore, that the church or the mission send an evangelist or a teacher to instruct people. For the next months people discuss their decision. Some people reaffirm their desire to become Christians. This second decision is critical for their growth. Until it is made, the gospel, in a sense, is on trial. Later decisions further strengthen them in their faith. Other people choose to return to their old gods. Having affirmed the unity of the group by joining in its first decision, they are now free to reject the new religion. Only after this sorting has taken place, usually some months after the initial group decision, should missionaries and church leaders baptize the converts (Hiebert 1995, 159-60).

These principles of decision making by groups have tremendous implications for evangelism. When the individuals making such significant decisions are part of the same tightly-integrated kinship or sub-group, they exhibit what McGavran terms “mutual interdependence.”

*Mutually interdependent* means that all those taking the decision are intimately known to each other and *take the step in view of what the other is going to do*. This is not only natural, it is moral. Indeed, it is immoral, as a rule, to decide what one is going to do regardless of what others do (McGavran 1990, 303).

In other words, the natural response of a new convert is to instinctively want to share his or her new faith with those whom he or she loves. This helps explain the phenomenon of church planting movements. As each new convert shares naturally his or her faith with others who share the same segment of society, additional conversions follow. McGavran describes the way this frequently occurs in people movements:

In a people movement, members of the close-knit group seek to persuade their loved ones of the great desirability of believing on Jesus Christ and becoming Christians. Often they will defer their own decision in order to be baptized together. A husband waits six months for an unbelieving wife. A brother labors for two years so that his other three brothers and their wives will all confess Christ together—the conversion made sweeter because it is shared with the people who supremely matter to him (ibid, 303).



These converts easily form Christian fellowship groups (churches) with people of the same segment and these assist in forming still others, hence the “rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people or population segment” that describes a church planting movement (Garrison 1999, 7).

This process of group-oriented conversion is not some novel approach to salvation, as the basic elements remain the same. There is still the necessity of individual conviction of sin and personal repentance or turning away from any previous commitment to false gods. There is still the essential element of turning to Jesus Christ as the only mean of forgiveness and salvation. Each person receives God’s grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit as an individual. Further, Christian discipleship remains an issue of personal allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. Again Tippet helps us:

In this work I have spoken of people movements and I imply that they have specific structures, that the groups involved involved comprise individuals who have specific places and rights. The group does not exist as a living organism unless the individuals act and interact, each according to his specific role and rights. Biblically the church is conceived in the same terms as a body. The total group is really the decision-making body, although it may be for one individual to make the pronouncement as the representative of all. In many communal societies there is no decision without unanimity in the village or tribal councils. The decision-making group may be a family, or a village, or a lineage, or a caste. This is a basic determinant in people movements (Tippett 1971, 199-200).

There is an aspect of this group-oriented decision process that is often overlooked by persons from the Western tradition with its emphasis upon the individualistic side of salvation. This aspect is the fact that conversion in people movements is often seen more clearly in the wider scope of its community-wide implications. Individual conversion is accentuated by the fact that other family members as well as members of the same village group share in the experience. Together, individuals accomplish what they could never do alone. Stock clarifies the principles involved in group-conversion as he describes a people movement among the Chuhra of the Punjab:

Most converts were influenced by the social pressure of their relatives and friends to take Christianity seriously as an option and to investigate its superiority over their old faith. Group discussions on these matters led to individual decisions for Christ, strongly influenced no doubt by the response of friends and neighbors, but

nevertheless genuine and personal. The closely knit social structure did not encourage individuals to make a decision independent of the extended family group. Only a few had the courage to do so. When by common consent a whole family unit decided for Christ, then the individuals in it found a supportive fellowship in which to grow in faith. Converts remained a part of the social structure to which they were accustomed. Unlike the individuals who had been expelled from their high caste homes, the Churhras by remaining part of their society were far more stable morally (Stock 1978, 75).

Tippett emphasizes the effectiveness of group-orientation in evangelization:

In many societies the man who acts alone as an individual is guilty of treason. This does not mean that he cannot think or speak as an individual and claim his rights. Church growth studies demonstrate that responses to the gospel have been more effective where missionary advocates have directed their appeals to autonomous decision-making groups, who have power to act alone. Winning converts out of, or against, or in spite of their families may build a few strong individual Christians, but it throws up tremendous barriers against the Christian appeal. It also isolates the Christian from his natural environment and social structure and makes him dependent on foreign resources. (Tippet 1971, 200).

Subbamma suggests against the backdrop of Hindu society that in people movements there is a characteristic growth of private consensus that builds toward a shared-group public commitment. Personal decisions form individually over a period of time. Subbamma states:

It is far better to allow the faith to spread throughout the web of relations of family, friends, and social strata before public commitment is asked of individuals. When individuals who are convinced of the Gospel and determined to become Christians form a “block” large enough to hold its own against the pressures of the remainder of the group, and exert a real evangelical influence among the still non-Christian element of their people, then they profess their faith (Subbamma 1970, 106).

Wold describes group-conversion in Liberia in which there is “an initial conversion out of paganism” and a subsequent “later conversion into

Christianity” (Wold 1968, 135). He refers to conversion out of paganism as the public commitment by a group to break from the old ways and turn toward Jesus Christ as the new way for their family or village, acknowledging that only a limited number of that first group will have an adequate understanding of how to become a Christian. At that point, missionaries and/or existing churches and church leaders must provide training and clarification so that individuals may decide to follow Christ personally.<sup>26</sup> Keysser refers to the same process when describing a group awakening in Papua, New Guinea. A few individual decisions are followed by a “group conversion” as the group has time to consider the change as a whole. “Group conversion must follow group awakening. The two can be regarded as one long process of renewal” (Keysser 1938, 410).

### 1.7.3 Evangelization through kinship webs In Extended-Family Integrated Societies

A third principle of people movement strategy describes the way the movement spreads from one group to another and may be termed kinship webs. Peter B. Hammond, professor of anthropology, Indiana University, observes that “in most cultures the social systems of greatest importance are based on kinship.

Human beings everywhere are born into some sort of family. And almost always this family is important in giving them-literally and figuratively-a start in life: producing them, feeding, clothing, protecting, and educating them, and eventually establishing for them a ‘place’ in society. . . . In most cultures the kin group plays an even more important role [than in America], lasting through life as the principal source of the individual’s emotional, economic, social-and frequently supernatural-support, and providing the basis for community organization” (Hammond 1978, 145-46). Bickers connects this essential element of society with the potential for people movements:

Each given sub-unit within the various strata of society composes an individual nucleus group in which a people movement can potentially break out. It has already been pointed out that such movements come into being as a few individuals make initial personal commitments to Christ, remain in their family and social group, share their new faith with others until a group consensus gradually congeals, and then join with the others of their family and friends in making a unified public

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<sup>26</sup> Wold notes that similar experiences have been observed among the Dani tribe in West New Guinea.

declaration of their faith in baptism. Once such a movement is established within a local community, there are several factors involved in its capacity to spread to other similar groups, with the result that eventually very large portions of a geographic region may become involved (Bickers 1977, 45).

McGavran calls the key to the whole system a “web of relationships.” Here he summarizes the nature and importance of a web of relationships among non-Western peoples:

In Africasia, the web counts tremendously. Every man has, knows, and is intimate with not merely brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents, but also with cousins, uncles, aunts, great-uncles, sisters-in-law, mothers-in-law, godfathers and godmothers, grandnieces and grandnephews, and many others. In his world, these are the people who count. He can expect a night’s hospitality in any of these houses. He belongs. Relatives will shield him from the law, try to get him a job, or help him select a wife or an ox in case he should need either. News of deaths and marriages within the web passes through the family like lightning, and relatives drop all other duties to go to the funerals or weddings. Members of other clans or families can become Christian and he remains unmoved; but let “one of us” become Christian and he is deeply stirred (McGavran 1990, 321).

McNee has pointed out a significant truth related to people movements. He indicates that the unity and solidarity of the clan is uppermost in the minds of all its members. Though this may be a hindrance in the early introduction of Christianity into clan life, as increasing numbers of individuals make Christward decision the momentum shifts toward Christianity, motivating others to consider the Christian faith in order to maintain and enhance clan unity. Clan members do not want to be left behind and endanger solidarity (McNee 1976, 72). Pickett provides numerous examples of kinship web-based evangelism. In one case he records:

Every convert is a potential evangelist and the potentialities of many converts are enormous. One Waddara was found to have near relatives in fourteen villages. Within a year of his conversion he influenced six groups in which he had relatives to enroll as catechumens. A man’s relatives, caste associates and neighbors are interested when they learn that he has become a Christian. Even

though they may become angry and attempt to punish him, they will await with eagerness some sign of the effect of his conversion upon him, and if he gives a clear witness to benefits received, peace and joy, moral victory and other fruits of the Spirit, they will be favorably impressed. Many converts with whom we talked told of their early opposition to relatives who preceded them in accepting Christ (Pickett 1938, 128).

“Every home or village in which there is a nucleus group of Christian believers becomes the stepping stone to the establishment of yet another unit or cell. The possibilities of growth in such a people movement are astronomical, for the faith can potentially grow in logarithmic proportions” (Bickers 1977, 50). A biblical basis for this idea of evangelization through kinship webs may be found in the New Testament and it forms the true foundation for all discussion and understanding of church planting movements. That basis is centered in the Greek word *oikos*.<sup>27</sup> An *oikos* may simply be defined as one’s circle of influence composed of family (relatives), close friends, neighbors and co-workers. It is a social system based on common kinship, common community, and common interests and is not only transcultural but transhistorical as well, reaching across centuries. The matter of *oikos* will be considered in much greater detail in chapter three as we consider a biblical foundation for the church planting movement model.

## **1.8 Problems with the Church Growth Movement and People Movements**

### **1.8.1 Analysis of People Movement concept from the Indian context**

McGavran’s Indian analysis and subsequent Church Growth Movement theory is not without its problems. First, it is an imprecise generalization to state that, in people movements, important decisions are made only in groups. Studies subsequent to Pickett’s analysis could not support a typology of only group decision. Group conversion tended to be a mixed phenomenon, which would include private, individual decisions going against the collective inclination. In addition, the involvement of women and children in group decision-making has not been adequately assessed in Pickett’s study, analysis being limited to family heads, thus

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<sup>27</sup> See Acts 10:1-2, 24, 33; 16:12-15, 31-34.

challenging McGavran's thesis (derived from Pickett) that decision making is 'mutually interdependent.' Rather, we would expect many decisions to be hierarchical, as supported by the New Testament *oikos* pattern, family members acquiescing to the head's decision. Further, McGavran subordinates conversion motive to such an extent that it is rendered almost insignificant. In both *The Bridges of God*, and *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, McGavran omits from his analysis the phenomenon of conversion away from Christianity and out of Hinduism. Analysis of such groups would give greater clarity to the importance of motive.

Repeatedly, McGavran stresses the centrality of evangelism, and the need to re-appropriate resources away from holistic mission projects, to this overriding priority. Yet, the attractiveness of the gospel to Indian tribals and untouchables was not primarily theological but social. Many mass movements occurred when missions did precisely the opposite of what McGavran advocates; they abandoned a purely spiritual approach, becoming involved in advocacy on behalf of the oppressed, seeking to aid their physical emancipation. Conversely, other Indian mass movements were arrested when this 'social' action was abandoned in favor of more overtly spiritual approaches.

At the level of praxis, McGavran's purpose to promote people movements raises several unresolved questions. With pre-evangelism at times requiring 'decades', when can the decision be made that a people are unresponsive? How can the decision of resource allocation be made in light of this fact? Is it ethical to neglect a people because of unresponsiveness? Should there be a dichotomy between evangelism and social action? Has the history of the Indian church shown that more holistic models are perhaps more 'successful'?

#### `1.8.2 Concerns related to the use of Caste in Church Planting Movements

At the functional level, caste has always served as a double-edged sword, allowing spread within a socially cohesive group, but also limiting the spread beyond the group. McGavran's utilization of caste is limited to the functional level, and he thus fails to appreciate its symbolic significance in attributing irremovable, religious uncleanness; caste was an identity from which untouchables strove to escape. In seeking to apply his methodology to higher castes, McGavran fails adequately to appraise the social status of respondents. Mass movements started exclusively amongst the most impoverished. This raises questions about the applicability of McGavran's

thesis to other more socially advantaged groups. McGavran also presents group movements as representing irrevocable changes in allegiance to Christianity. The actual histories tend to be less certain. Many converts demonstrated greater loyalty to the bindhari (brotherhood) than to denominational Christianity, shifting allegiance within Christianity, and at times recanting. The Indian pattern of conversion, on which McGavran bases his thesis, is more fluid than McGavran's own orderly presentation, social allegiance taking priority over adherence to a creedal system.

Perhaps the greatest question concerns the use of caste as McGavran's homogeneous unit principle (HUP). McGavran understands society to be composed of many such units, although he accepts that culture is dynamic, and concedes that 'the term homogeneous unit is very elastic' (McGavran 1990, 165). Proponents of the Church Growth Movement seek to identify such units in societies and through evangelism to promote conversion movements within these units. Biblical justification for this racial approach to evangelism is derived from the Church Growth Movement's understanding of the Great Commission. McGavran understands the phrase in Mathew 28:19, '*panta ta ethne*', to mean 'classes, tribes, lineages, and peoples of the earth' (McGavran 1980, 22). From this finding McGavran concludes 'that people become Christian fastest when least change of race or clan is involved'.<sup>31</sup> Homogeneous units are thus justified biblically as being basic ecclesiastical building blocks, McGavran stating: 'tribe, caste, clan...can be considered as God's orders of preservation, to be respected till God replaces it' (McGavran 1955, 23).

Bosch is critical of McGavran's exegesis, stating that 'on the slender basis of the interpretation of Matthew.28:19 "...the CGM has erected an imposing superstructure."<sup>28</sup> Tracing the use of *ethne* as the normal rendering of the Old Testament word *gô yim*, for nations, Bosch notes that *ethne* can have an ethnological meaning (Bosch 1983, 235). However, "in the more recent parts of the Old Testament the plural *gô yim* is to be understood almost exclusively...as the collective designation not for nations but for Gentiles and pagans" (ibid, 236). According to Bosch, *ethne* is therefore to be understood as a technical term for Gentiles in contrast to Jews. The Great Commission is placing an emphasis on discipling the entire world of humanity. The issue is of salvation history, the new covenant being universal (ibid, 237). This view sees McGavran's rendering of the text as the reading back into the text of a modern concern.

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<sup>28</sup> D. Bosch, 'The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20', in W.R. Shenk (ed.), *Exploring Church Growth*(Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1983) 235.

McGavran's experience and analysis of 'caste-wide' movements in India was crucial for his formation of the HUP. In seeking to utilize the caste structure as a homogeneous unit through which church growth can be channeled McGavran sanctions caste-based denominations. He endorses the proposal of Canjanam Gamaliel, a third-generation Lutheran minister in Kerala, who states that 'caste should be recognized as one of "God's orders of preservation"' (McGavran 1990, 240). Conversion movements channeled within a caste tend to accentuate caste differences rather than diminish them. It should be reiterated that McGavran's pragmatism results in caste being appraised only at a functional level within culture. This does not, however, admit that working within the caste structure along homogeneous lines subordinates the prophetic task involved in proclaiming the gospel to the acceptance of social structures. Instead, the gospel works from inside out, beginning with things as they are and then seeking to change them. The gospel thus takes the path of least resistance through society, with only the mature being expected to transcend racial barriers. This does not make the gospel into the message of the social status quo but instead places conversion at the beginning rather than the end of the sanctification process.



## CHAPTER 2

### CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY COMPARED WITH TRADITIONAL MISSION STRATEGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

Observation has been made to this point that persons have historically entered the Kingdom of God through one of two modes. These may be distinguished as the “one-by-one” or individualistic manner versus the “kinship web”/*oikos* manner. The former manner has been the primary strategy utilized by missionaries regardless of geographical location or people group focus. The term largely associated in mission literature with the “one-by-one” or individualistic approach is “mission-station approach” and was coined by McGavran in his descriptions of traditional missionary strategy.<sup>29</sup> The latter *oikos* mode appears consistent with the historical channel through which the most significant church growth has occurred regardless of geographical location or specific people group. This manner is associated with what Pickett and McGavran termed “people movements” and what is now known as the church planting movement strategy. Both approaches focus on winning the world to Jesus Christ and church expansion, but they are diametrically opposed methods toward the accomplishment of the stated task.

In the individualistic mission strategy, emphasis is placed upon the individual as disconnected from his or her kinship web and frequently results in

Christian converts severing traditional social and family relationships, thereby becoming ostracized and forced to become part of a what amounts to a separate and distinct Christian caste. On the other hand, the Church Planting Movement strategy focuses on the Church as the natural expression of the related people group and is generally characterized by a multi-individual and mutually interdependent pattern of group ingathering, resulting in Christian converts remaining intact in their *oikos*, thus promoting additional expansion.

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<sup>29</sup> See McGavran, Donald, *Bridges of God*, London: World Dominion Press, 1955, pp. 42-69.

## 2.2 Traditional Missionary Strategy

### 2.2.1 Societal resistance to Western Missionary-Introduced Christianity

At least in the initial stages of evangelistic endeavor in many areas of missionary outreach, the Christian faith has been seen as a “foreign religion” by nationals.<sup>30</sup> Such a response is understandable when seen in practices such as the following Lutheran practice in Therangampadi in the early 1800’s.

According to Lutheran practice in Tharangampadi and Thanjavur men and women were made to sit separately. Women had to cover their heads. The catechisms and the common prayer book used were that of the Lutheran Church. Several rituals and festivals of the Lutherans were observed....The church workers were called ‘catechists’ (Gnanadason 1996, 59).

The foreignness of Christianity to those non-western peoples is also reflected in a recent statement made by a Korean missionary concerning mission history in Japan. Chang Kyu Lee writes, “I believe that Japanese churches have not rapidly grown mainly because of faulty mission strategies of western missionaries” (Lee 1995, 3). All too often, conversion to Christianity requires a convert to repudiate his kinship group and therefore to be interpreted as an act of disloyalty and one to be opposed by social pressure, ostracism, or even physical harm.

James Scherer describes three main types of distortion of a clear theocentric missionary basis. The ‘political’ displacement of the apostolic motive covers the history of Christian expansion from Constantine through the Spanish conquest to western colonialism. In modern times, it corresponds to recent western dominance of Africa and Asia. The political and spiritual aspects of the *corpus christianum*<sup>31</sup> advance together. Missionaries carry out a parallel function alongside military and political administrators, causing them to be seen as agents of imperialism. “For fifteen hundred years, missions were used as an instrument of state policy in pacifying barbarian peoples and new territories” (Scherer 1964, 30).

A second distortion is “cultural” displacement. The lengthy development of Christianity in Europe eventually led to seeing the gospel as

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<sup>30</sup> The term “national” is much preferred over the more antiquated “native.” The goal is to use a term without prejudicial and ethnocentric implication.

<sup>31</sup> The unique combination of secular and religious ingredients often termed “Christendom.”

a moral force, capable of elevating and improving society. Missions were viewed as an ideal means by which Christians could share their cultural superiority with the less fortunate. Educational, medical, and welfare institutions became tangible expressions of a “civilized” gospel. The missionary moved to being the bearer of Christian culture as well as moral standards with the aim of reproducing Christendom among the pagans. The first missionary recruits by the first American missionary board were advised to “make them English in their language, civilized in their habits, and Christian in their religion” (ibid, 32). A similar charge was given to the pioneer missionaries to Hawaii:

. . . aim at nothing short of covering those islands with fruitful fields and pleasant dwellings and schools and churches, and of raising the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization (ibid, 32).

Alexander Duff sought to “lay a mine to the citadel of Hinduism” in India by introducing English literature, as well as western science and ideals into the curriculum of Christian schools. “The work which Mr. Duff came to India to do required no ordinary amount of courage, tact and patience... On his arrival he found he should have to contend, not only with the ignorance and idolatry of heathenism, but with the distrust and opposition of his brother missionaries already on the field, and with the obstinately maintained neutrality of the English government—a neutrality which, through cowardice and weakness, did more for the support of Hindooism (original spelling) than for its overthrow” (Vermilye 1890, 17).

A third form of displacement of the apostolic motive is “ecclesiasticism.” Here, mission becomes the propagation of a particular church or denomination with its dogma, order, ministry, and ritual. Scherer calls this approach *ecclesia plantanda*.<sup>32</sup> Denominations with their corresponding missionary societies competed in planting denominational churches side-by-side in Africa and Asia, thereby perpetuating the problems of a divided Christian community among the mission churches. The preoccupation with denominationalism brought about two related intrusions into national churches and religious culture: clericalism and institutionalism. “Clericalism” embraces the western tradition of theologically trained and paid clergy. This idea places Christian ministry into a professional category and sees the role of “laymen” as subsidiary and supportive to *the* minister. “‘Institutionalism’ dispenses religious services and enrolls members” (Scherer 1964, 36). This concept

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<sup>32</sup> “The reproduction of the pattern of the mother church” (Scherer 1964, 35).

acknowledges the church's institutional ministries as a means of fulfilling its purposes and objectives, making the church a social and political force as well as a spiritual one.

With the “triumph” of Christianity under Constantine and the official establishment of the church under his successors, the frontiers of the church were pushed back with the new pagans being barbarians and primitive races living on the borders of the Roman Empire. Missions became to be understood in a distinctly geographic sense and missionaries were persons sent to the frontiers of civilization to propagate the faith of the civilized world. Missionaries paved the way for a settled ecclesiastical structure with a clerical hierarchy, parishes, schools, and hospitals. “The Protestant Reformation continued the policy of extending Christianity into the territories controlled by evangelical princes. . . . According to the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, a ruler was not only entitled but even obligated to determine the religious adherence of his subjects. Protestantism did not at once lead to the introduction of religious freedom” (ibid, 47).

### 2.2.2 Missions and Colonialism

The historical link between missionary expansion and colonialism has had consequences that are far reaching in their effect: “*L’expansion missionnaire est contemporaine de l’expansion coloniale*” (Mehl 1947, 149). As one who has experienced the Western missionary presence in India—both in the church and in the seminaries and as a student of the history of Christianity in India—I am aware of the ambiguities of the missionary enterprise as well. Growing up as a citizen of the independent nation of India and receiving Christian nurture from the Church of South India has instilled in me a critical eye that never fails to detect the problematic character of the church's missionary activity. Moreover, my active engagement with Hindus, Muslims, and others through programs of interreligious dialogue has exposed me to the bankruptcy of the traditional views of Christian mission. This has prodded me to rethink the idea of mission, so to speak, from the ground up” (Thangaraj 1999, 9).

In many ways, the word 'missionary' has become as unpopular as the word 'colonialist'. This view is reflected in the titles of some of the books published since 1960, e.g. *Missions in a Time of Testing*; *Missions at the Crossroads*; *The Unpopular Missionary*; *The Ugly Missionary*; *Missionary Go Home*<sup>33</sup>; and *End of an Era* (Bowen 1996, 99). The two regions most

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<sup>33</sup> James A. Sherer's book by the same title (*Missionary, Go Home!*) serves as a helpful reorientation to a biblical missionary obligation.

affected by missionary expansion and colonialism are Africa and Asia. Boel describes the apparent linkage as follows:

Because of the historical link between the spread of Christianity and the expansion of Western colonial power, Christian missions in many Asian and African countries have come to be regarded as the unwelcome legacy of a historical era which has now come to its close. 'Mission countries' which have won political independence are now engaged in an attempt towards wiping out all vestiges of Western imperialism wherever they can afford to do so. Christianity being considered as one aspect of Western civilization – Western imperialism in religious garb -, it is not surprising that the effort towards rebuilding a new, indigenous culture and civilization is partly directed against Christian missions and missionaries (Boel 1975, 1).

What is the truth about the relationship between missions and colonialism? For one thing, the missionaries that brought the Gospel to many peoples of the world were of the same race, and often, the same nationality as the colonizers. This caused many critics to associate the missionary movement with the colonization impetus, when, actually missionaries often preceded colonizers and were the first Europeans to contact nationals. While this apparent association resulted in "*une solidarité de fait entre colonization et mission*", (Mehl 1947, 150), there are many cases demonstrating that this interdependence was not "a matter of conscious, deliberate policy, and that there were often severe conflicts between missions and colonial policy" (Boel 1975, 14). However, it is clear that missionaries most often welcomed European intervention and even in some cases sought after it. A case in point is when English missionaries encouraged the reluctant British government to annex East Africa (Nthamburi 1991, 26). Charles New, the Methodist pioneer missionary did all he could to encourage the British government to establish colonial rule in Kenya (Kendall 1978, 113). Missionaries went so far as to assist the colonization process in its initial stages. "Missionaries were often led to make one town rather than another their centre through the urging of some ship's captain, himself a member of their church back home"<sup>34</sup> (Muzorewa 1985, 24). In areas void of government agents, missionaries acted as administrators. The Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate in 1905 justified the opening of more mission stations for these reasons:

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<sup>34</sup> A quote from Beetham (1967, 11).

There are districts in East Africa such as Taita and the lower Tana in which European influence has hitherto been represented almost entirely by missionaries, but which have made as great progress as the regions which have been taken in hand by

government officials. (Nthamburi 1991, 27)

The missionary has to accept the responsibility of giving colonialism respectability that it otherwise would not have attained.<sup>35</sup> Granted, the missionary like many other Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century believed that the European powers were the benefactors and even saviors of those whom they colonized.

In dealing with African savage tribes we are dealing with a people who are practically at the genesis of things . . . and we cannot expect to lift them in a few years from this present state to that of a highly civilised European people . . . The evolution of races must necessarily take centuries to accomplish satisfactorily.<sup>36</sup> (Sorrenson 1968, 227)

Some missionaries in India who collaborated with the colonialists were called the “political Padri” (n.a.1979, 182). This caused many Indians to conclude that Christianity was Western, and more precisely British. “Devilal, the former Deputy Prime minister of India, said that all Christians should leave India” (Rajendran 1998, 29). “The story of South India in the seventies leaves no doubt as to the sincerity of the Society’s (CMS) commitment to an independent native church. It does however reveal a list of obstacles: the ever present missionary opposition; the division and jealousies of the Indian church; the apparent reluctance of elements within the indigenous church to surrender the benefits of European connection; the difficulty of a relationship to a state colonial Church of England in India and the deep CMS suspicion of any scheme which was wider than its own theological traditions” (Williams 1990, 68-69).

In East Africa until the 1950's, British colonial policy seemed aimed at making Kenya 'a white man's country' (Adewoye 1971, 30). The British Order-in-Council legalized the alienation of land in Kenya, and by 1915, about 6,000 square miles - mostly in the fertile Highlands region - had been alienated to European settlers under the Crown Lands Ordinance, 1902. By

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<sup>35</sup> Dillenberger and Welch remind us that this type of collaboration between church and state can be traced back to the Roman Empire during Constantine's rule: “When Christianity had become the established religion of the empire, the propagation of the faith had been actively sponsored by the rulers of the Christian countries. This had continued to be true of the expansion in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, when the work of the Roman Catholic missionaries was strongly supported by governments of Spain and Portugal, and Orthodox missionaries by the Russian government.” (1954, 174)

<sup>36</sup> A memo on native policy from John Ainsworth and C. W. Hobley to the Colonial Office dated 13 November, 1909.

1913 the entire Maasai tribe was moved from their home in the Rift Valley to the Laikipia region in order to make room for European settlers. Unfortunately, the very nature of their work involved missionaries in the land problems of the Protectorate. They needed land for mission stations and other activities, selecting locations in the midst of populous districts in the hopes of gathering a greater harvest of souls. At times they engaged in highly commercialized farming to raise money for expansion of their mission efforts. The missionary occupation of the highlands coincided with that of the settlers: missionaries took up land alongside settlers, under the same land regulations, and adopted the same methods of cultivation (Sorrenson 1968, 256). Not only were the nationals skeptical of the missionaries in their acquisition of tribal lands but the European settlers as well.

Many of the settlers became profoundly distrustful of the missionaries and resented their educative influence on Africans. The settlers went to East Africa because they hoped to make money, or because the highlands seemed to offer them a congenial refuge, free from disagreeable conventions and restrictions at home (ibid, 229).

Missionary activity during colonialism was more or less the same regardless of location.

Colonialism became even more oppressive following World War I. Settlers called for a policy of forced labor to provide a cheap and abundant work force. There was, however, strong missionary protest against it. In British East Africa, when the policy of forced labor was inaugurated by Governor Northey in 1919, the Alliance of Protestant Missions criticized it as being cruel to Africans. In Britain, Dr. J. H. Oldham, Secretary of the Conference of British Missionary Societies, studied the Kenya labor situation and said it pointed to the greater issue of whether or not the interests of the African people or the interest of the settlers were primary. In a letter to the Colonial Office dated 17 May, 1921, he wrote:

A policy which leaves the native population no future except as workers on European estates cannot be reconciled with trusteeship. Nor can it, in the long run, conduce to the economic prosperity of the East African Protectorates. The chief wealth of these territories is the people, and, on a long view, the cardinal aim of policy must be to maintain tribal life, to encourage the growth of population by combating disease and promoting sanitation and hygiene, and to

develop by education the industry and intelligence of the population.  
(Langley 1974, 109)

Ultimately because of this protest, the Devonshire White Paper was issued in 1923, declaring that . . . "the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that, if and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail" (ibid, 109). The Alliance also opposed reduced African wages and higher taxes imposed on Africans. In 1936 the average amount spent on the education of an African child was 16 shillings, as opposed to 500 shillings for every white child. In 1920 the *kipande* system, was introduced whereby every African male over sixteen years had to carry on his person a registration certificate for the purpose of identification, to remind him of his inferior and subordinate status in his own country (Adewoye 1971, 32). During the 1930's and 1940's there was a growing cultural nationalism that did not enjoy missionary favor. The defense of female circumcision by the Kikuyu Central Association during the late 1920's and early 1930's was symptomatic of cultural self-assertion. That spirit was also evident in the emergence of schools free from missionary control and geared towards economic and social development of the Kikuyu without destroying their cultural essence. The Kenya Teacher Training College was founded at Githunguri (Kiambu) in 1939 to provide teachers for the independent schools. Parallel efforts at self-assertion were noticeable in the Church, especially in Central and Western Kenya. Secessions from the missionary churches were known as early as 1916. In the 1930's and 40's they took on a more radical and nationalistic perspective. This was particularly true of the messianic-type movements, such as the *Dini ya Msambwa*, which advocated a return to traditional religion and the spread of anti-European sentiments (ibid, 34). The *Watu wa Mungu* were forbidden to use European clothes, money, and other things.

At times missionaries did not protest and even collaborated with the government. When the Mau Mau Movement appeared missionaries condemned it in strong terms, identifying the church with the status quo against weak and oppressed people (Wanyoike 1974).<sup>37</sup> The Christian

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<sup>37</sup> For additional information concerning Mau Mau, consult: Buijtenhuijs, Robert 1971, *Le Mouvement 'Mau-Mau': Une Revolte Paysanne et Anti-Coloniale en Afrique Noire*. The Hague and Paris: Moulton; Kaggia, Bildad 1975. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House; Thuku, Harry 1970. *Harry Thuku: An Autobiography*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.



Council of Kenya, consisting of both European and African Christians, condemned the movement, saying:

This is no struggle between white and black. It is a struggle between good and evil, between those who seek by violence to gain their own ends at the expense of all others. These violent men must be dealt with, that in peace, the rest of us may by peaceful and constitutional means seek the welfare of all.(Langley 1974, 112)

Some writers saw the Mau Mau Movement as a 'revolt by the Kikuyu against civilization and Christianity.' Overall during this period, the missionary, because he was white, enjoyed a position of privilege giving him or her greater authority in the community, which was resented by Africans. That attitude is exemplified by the comments of Jomo Kenyatta, first president of an independent Kenya. Speaking of the "religious imperialism" of early missionaries, Kenyatta writes:

They set out to uproot the African, body and soul, from his old customs and beliefs, put him in a class by himself, with all his tribal traditions shattered and his institutions trampled upon. The African, after having been detached from his family and tribe, was expected to follow the white man's religion without questioning whether it was suited for his condition of life or not (Kenyatta 1961, 269-70)

Some people even today in former European colonies are suspicious of the Church. The charge is often made that the Church cooperated too well with colonial governments that clearly discriminated against nationals (Langley 1974, 102). For example, in the midst of the circumcision controversy in Kenya in the 1920's, the Kikuyu people had a saying: *Gutiri muthungu na mubia* ("there is no difference between a setter/ colonialist and a missionary"). That era is past and missionaries are no longer policy-makers in many denominations, but the criticism is not easily forgotten. Even today there are those in the two-thirds world who claim the Church is a European institution that came with the colonialists and has no further relevance in the context of an independent nation. During the period of colonialism, much of national culture was altered or replaced by the more vigorous and technically advanced forms of colonizing western culture, backed by the political power dominant at the time. Even in the Church in colonized areas there was generally an attitude of demeaning traditional culture. Generations have grown up largely cut off from traditional forms of worship, and the only ways that are familiar are those adopted from Western

models. Among various peoples in former European colonies, worship is still conducted in a Western fashion<sup>38</sup> (Labrentz 1978, 292).

Western influence in Africa has not ceased, it has only changed its appearance; military arms-trade instead of slave-trade; economic imperialism instead of political dominion; power struggle of the big nations for spheres of influence in Africa; technological, managerial, organisational know-how positions instead of the old racial and social superiority assumptions; ideological propaganda and warfare through mass-media instead of 'educating these tribes towards self-government'<sup>39</sup> (Labrentz 1978, 163).

It is correct to say that there is basis for criticizing mission influence in colonial times since, by their cooperation, they strengthened the colonial position and often opposed the national struggle for independence. This weakened their Christian influence, which was, after all, the very reason for their presence in the country. In his book, *The End of an Era*, Kendall makes a good summary statement concerning the matter of missions and colonialism:

A conscious effort is needed by the Westerner to feel the power of the hostility of the modern African to the colonial period. Africans probably do not realize how neutral and detached the modern European feels from the colonial past... For our purpose the important fact is that in Africa colonialism is seen from an African perspective, that is, in large and stark outline. The close association of the missionary movement with it is a factor not to be ignored (Kendall 1978, 13).

### 2.2.3 Missionary influence and National response

K. M. Panikkar of India argues "that Christian missionary work in Asia is merely an epiphenomenon of Western political and economic expansion" (Panikkar 1969, 10). He writes elsewhere:

. . . the sense of not only Christian but European superiority which the missionaries perhaps unconsciously inculcated produced also its reaction. During the nineteenth century the belief in the racial

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<sup>38</sup> From a message delivered by Dr. Mulatu Baffa at the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly in Nairobi in December, 1976. His topic was, "Christianity, Culture, and Western Influence."

<sup>39</sup> Quotation from a message by Dr. Hans Burki at the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly in 1976.

superiority of the Europeans as a permanent factor in human history was widely held in the West. The missionary shared in this belief. He not only preached the exclusive truth of the Christian religion, but made claims for the uniqueness of European culture. This was unavoidable when a great deal of the mission activity had to be in the field of "western education." The missionary colleges taught European literature, European history and proclaimed the glories of European philosophies, art and culture. Now the strange thing in Asia was that, even during the days of unchallenged European political supremacy, rightly or wrongly no Asian people accepted the cultural superiority of the West. The educational activities of the Christian faith, only led to the identification of the work of Christian missions with "western and American cultural Aggression" (ibid, 455-56).

When not deliberately trying to destroy them, the colonial processes undermined the systems, values, and views of entire cultures.

These evaluative concepts, taken as facts, serve as the foundation for what may be called the bulldozer ethos of both western missions and colonialism in Africa. Like a bulldozer, missions tended to level other traditions . . . It should be no surprise that Africans, novelists, play wrights, politicians, academicians, and even churchmen saw missions as a form of western imperialism.(Tienou 1991, 11)

In schools and churches, Africans were taught to be ashamed of their "primitive" and "pagan" ways. According to Muga, "The intention of the European missionaries since the middle of the nineteenth century was to convert the Africans to Christianity and to purge them from what they believed to be heathen ways. . . . Actually, in the course of their work they made mistakes which had the effect of causing African resentment against certain aspects of Christianity as introduced by them" (Muga 1975). Colonial systems made westernization the way of human advancement and many people came to believe that "progress" consists of imitating foreign ways. Christian missionaries, either consciously or unwittingly, were accomplices to the errors of colonial leaders (Hillman 1993, 8).

Religious activity, aimed at displacing Africa's traditional religious symbol systems, and replacing them with foreign imports, was the greatest threat to the survival of African cultures. This is so, because

these cultures are intimately bound up with the people's traditional religious experiences. (ibid, 8)

However, the direct and indirect influence of foreign missionaries in the Two-thirds world has not always been negative. Boel argues that Panikkar's anti-Christian bias has made him overlook the positive aspects of Christian missionary work:

He also fails to make a distinction between the aims and objectives of colonial expansion on the one hand, and those of Christian missions on the other, as if the fact of their historical coincidence were to be taken as proof for the identity of objectives. It cannot be denied however, that many in Asia today share Panikkar's views on Christian missions and continue to associate the presence of Christianity in Asia with an historical era which definitely belongs to the past. Christianity remains a 'foreign' religion which it is difficult for them to 'place' in a socio-cultural context which has drastically changed with the retreat of Western colonial power and the advent of national independence (Boel 1975, 2).

Rajendran echoes this thought as he states, "By the indirect influence of missionaries, India remains today a secular rather than a sectarian nation. They campaigned against *Sati*<sup>40</sup>, female infanticide, and the class of Thugs. They worked to alleviate the condition of Hindu widows and temple prostitutes and raise the age of marriage. Raja Ram Mohun Roy's Hindu reformation was influenced by Christian missionaries and their teaching" (Rajendran 1998, 15). Later, several prominent Western Christians were associated with the Indian freedom movement, most notably Allan Octavian Hume who was the first president of the Indian National Congress, helping to change the misconception that Christianity was merely the other side of the Imperialist coin. Methodist missionary E. Stanley Jones vocally supported the Indian freedom movement in spite of resistance from the ruling British government. Indira Gandhi attended Bible studies in the home of Bishop J. Waskom Pickett. "In 1948 Nehru, fearing Gandhi would be assassinated, trusted Pickett to convince Gandhi to leave Delhi" (ibid, 16). Following independence, Pickett assisted in resolving community clashes between Sikhs and Hindus, and in 1969 Dr. Radha Krishnan praised the

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<sup>40</sup> In *Sati* a Hindu widow was burnt along with her deceased husband. Although not practiced by all Hindus, the gruesome practice was perpetuated by many as religious fanaticism. It was outlawed in 1829 by the British Viceroy William Bentinck through the efforts of William Carey and Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

impact of Indian Christians as keepers of law and order (Pickett 1980, 150-51). Khushwant Singh has called Western missionaries “helpers of the nation” (Singh 1992, 75). Few people are aware that the pioneering work of Christian scholar-missionaries on ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts, and their translation into European languages, was a key factor in the revival of these religions on the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even when the scholars were not Christian missionaries, Christian publishing houses were often the first to disseminate the results of their work” (Ramachandra 1996, 217).

Today, in spite of the rhetoric of enculturation, indigenization, and contextualization, the general situation is characterized by little more than literal translations and questionable substitutions. True incarnations of Christianity are

few and far between. Instead, there is in most Christian congregations a clinging to the model of missionary and pastoral ministry developed during the colonial period under the influence of western cultural ignorance. The dominant method used is still the importation of western theological systems, institutions, practices, and customs. Khushwant Singh has observed that “many Christians continued bearing high sounding English names, their women wore a comical mixture of European and Indian dress. Their hymns translated sung to outlandish tunes (which) evoked more derision than reverence” (Singh 1992, 76). These foreign elements heavily impact local cultures, undermining traditional world views, art forms, customary laws, and ethical norms (Hillman 1993, 11). What Bishop Stephen Neill observed in 1934 still holds true today. “Missionaries wished their converts to become as much like Englishmen as possible. Christianity in India today presents itself as an alien religion” (Rajendran 1998, 24). Such western obtrusion by missionaries has engendered a colossal identity crisis among modern national believers.

The point of certain past failure and potential future failure is theological in nature. Admittedly, church planters face sin problems—greed, selfishness, pride, hunger for power, self-centeredness, etc.—but they also face unique theological issues related to social and cultural organization. Hiebert states, “One important question facing all converts is what to do with their old customs. What music should they play? Whom should they marry? How should they bury their dead?” (Hiebert 1995, 166). In the past, Christian missionaries rejected most if not all “native” customs because they associate them with pagan beliefs and simply replaced them with western Christian practices. Some missionaries equated the gospel with

western Christianity and saw indigenous customs as inherently pagan in need of eradication. Other missionaries legitimately desired to guard against the danger of syncretism therefore causing them to challenge nationals to discontinue using their old customs. Hiebert explains the result of western missionary reaction to indigenous practices:

This wholesale rejection of old cultural ways created several problems. First, getting rid of old ways left a cultural vacuum that needed to be filled. Missionaries did so by introducing their own customs. Western music, clothing, food, marriages, and funerals replaced traditional practices. The western church became the model for tribal churches around the world. Consequently, Christianity was seen as a “white man’s” religion. Christian converts were branded as traitors to their own people and treated as foreigners in their own land. Second, when missionaries tried to suppress old cultural ways, these did not die—they went underground. Christians held Christian weddings in churches and then the traditional marriage rites in the village after the missionary and the pastor were gone. They prayed for healing in church but tied amulets and medicine bags under their clothes. The result was a mix of a public Christianity to get people to heaven and a private animism to protect them from the spirits, sickness, and death (ibid, 167).

Many national Christian leaders are now calling for an intentional and consequential self-examination that will render an indigenous expression of authentic Christianity. Narayan Vaman Tilak (1861-1919) was outspoken in his call for an indigenous expression of Indian Christianity. Tilak’s characteristic emphasis throughout his Christian ministry was on the importance of being an *Indian* disciple of Jesus Christ, removing Western forms and replacing them with Indian patterns. His wife Lakshmibai summarized his emphasis:

He was convinced that by *bhajan*, *kirtan*, and *purana* he could completely wipe off the alienness of the Christian religion. He says of *Abhanganjali* ‘I have always pointed it out to all my Christian brothers and sisters how much importance *bhajan*, *kirtan*, *pravachan*, and *purana* have in this country in religious practice and evangelism. We are really happy and we are grateful to the Lord that from the instant when Rev. Pulhari Wilson first started *bhajan* only within 7 or 8 years there are so many *bhajan* societies among Maharashtrian

Christian people. Because of them devotion in Christian people is more and more increasing' (Richard 1998, 71).

Tilak broke with the westernized wedding ceremony when his son Devdatt was married, incorporating the traditional seven steps of the Hindu ceremony into a new ceremony with deeply biblical content. Tilak also introduced a new terminology, suggesting that a Christian individual is a *Hindi*, but not a *Hindu*. As a result of this new terminology he almost always spoke of Hindistan rather than Hindustan. Unfortunately, such steps would never become widely accepted (ibid, 72).

Along with the positive achievements by missionaries in emancipation, education, and fostering Christian values among the people of India, there have been detractions. Rajendran lists several limitations of foreign missionaries that left a less than desirable influence on Christian work in India:

1. Racial Prejudice.

"It is said that some European missionaries held racial prejudice<sup>41</sup> against blacks or coloured people. Today some coloured missionaries act the same way when dealing cross culturally with other races, tribes or castes" (Rajendran 1998, 22).

2. Disunity and Competition.

Bishop Stephen Neill summarized disunity among Christian groups by stating, "The missionaries say that they have come just to preach Christ. All that they really want is to get people into their own little cages (after which) they will not even allow them to receive the Holy Communion together" (Neill 1970, 37-39).

3. Exaggerated or Negative Reports.

In Desai's book, *Christianity in Africa as Seen by Africans*, the author questions the early missionaries at this point:

Missionaries arrived in Africa already despising the African and his way of life. The early missionaries labored under the assumption that Africans were without any religion, education, or culture and that Africa provided a virgin field where they could sow the seeds of Western religion and civilization. It is revealing to note the attitude of some of the early missionaries towards the Africans. In 1873 a missionary remarked, 'When I carry my torch into the caves of Africa, I meet only filthy birds of darkness.' (Desai 1962, 13)

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<sup>41</sup> *Varnashrama* is the Indian expression of racism.

4. Failure to Identify with Host Cultures.

Jack C. Winslow, a friend of Gandhi, wrote: “missionaries with the Gospel brought unessential Western accomplishments” (Winslow 1954, 77). Sisir Kumar Das adds: “In spite of its Asiatic origin Christianity appeared as the religion of the European to many Indians in the early phase of their contact with it” (Das 1974, 1).

5. Wholesale Rejection of Indian Culture.

According to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, “Converts were called upon to separate themselves radically from society. But the ‘churchly’ society was rather a transplanted version of medieval ‘Christendom’” (Newbigin 1974, 86). In some cases, new converts were removed from their culture by necessity because their lives were threatened by their forward caste families. But resettling Christians from the culture to the mission compound stopped people group movements to Christ and created a new Christian culture that was dominated by the majority caste from which the converts came (Rajendran 1998, 25-26).

6. Ridicule of Hinduism.

H. L. Richard observes,

Too often in the process of preaching Christ, missionaries were involved in public ridicule of Hinduism” (Richard 1991,12). Missionaries often displayed a sense of superiority and publicly ridiculed Hinduism, thus strengthening the belief that Christianity was the religious side of the propagation of colonial power. “Houghton summarized the attitudes of some of these missionaries as ‘officialism’, with a sense of a master to his employee; a spirit of ‘masterfulness’ with a relationship of superior to inferior and; some missionaries were more ‘self-seeking’ than their calling allowed for” (Rajendran 1998, 27).

Traditional missionary philosophy with implication for mission strategy may be summarized in two parts. First, the tendency of early and later missionaries has been to treat everything pre-Christian as either harmful or valueless and it continues today in many cases. This tendency to condemn all things “native” comes not so much from actual observation but more from ignorance on the part of foreigners. “Many missionaries have been too simply convinced of Western superiority and have come unconsciously, but naturally, as bearers not only of the Christian message but also of westernization” (Hastings 1967, 61). In order to combat this, the



missionary must recognize that native culture has a past - its own past. Respect for a people involves a consciousness of their past; i.e. recognition that history did not begin with the arrival of the white man. "The significant transforming impact of the Gospel upon the non-Western world arises from non-Western responses to the Gospel in its own terms and not in terms of Western expectations" (Bediako 1995, 174).

The second mission philosophy has even greater implication for mission strategy. This is the emphasis on individuality rather than "the group." Westerners stress individualism in every facet of life. "Most Western missionaries in Japan have made the mistake of excessively emphasizing individual conversion and intellectual biblical education. . . With stress laid only upon individual conversion, mission in Japan has produced only a loosely assembled body of Christians who exist for the most part as isolated individuals, rather than as members of families and larger groups" (Lee 1995, 60-61). Such intense individualism is foreign to most communal peoples. "Western individualism has become so intense that it has frequently undermined biblical Christianity" (Van Rheen 1991, 129).

#### 2.2.4 Implications of Traditional Mission Strategy

The individualistic approach to evangelism in the context of a communal society most often leads to local antagonism toward Christianity and the erection of numerous forms of social and psychological barriers to its dissemination. McGavran suggests that when non-Christian communities observe individuals converting to Christianity in spite of family disapproval and community sentiment, they conclude:

that Christians are always rebels against the community. . . . The image gets fixed in the mind of the public that to become Christian is an antisocial act. Once this conviction has seized the minds of church leaders, Christians, and public, a people is very unlikely, even in circumstances where it might normally occur (McGavran 1990, 301).

The net effect of the individualistic approach is to establish largely artificial mission-dominated churches without any significant opportunity for witness to the larger unreached community.

The individual-oriented approach of traditional mission strategy serves primarily to disrupt the convert from his or her vital family and communal ties and to dishonor him or her in the eyes of those in authority, often displacing him or her as he flees ostracism by withdrawal among other alienated believers. His or her withdrawal from the community serves only

as confirmation to the minds of unreached family members and authority figures that their fears and assumptions concerning the “foreign” religion were in fact correct. Invariably, this weakens if not negates entirely any appreciable witness the individual might have among members of his or her own community, even though they are the ones with whom he or she would most like to share his new-found faith in Christ. Bickers relates the following example of traditional mission strategy in China as told by Warnshuis:

In South Fukien the people live in clan villages; they are governed by clan elders; society is organized around the clan. There are certain market places to which the people come on market days for the exchange of their produce and to obtain the wares not purchasable elsewhere. Missionary policy has located our chapels in these market places because these are neutral ground and there we could avoid becoming involved in’ clan rivalries. Invitations were sometimes received to open a chapel in a clan village, but these generally were declined because inquiry soon revealed ulterior motives that were often related to some quarrel with another clan. Cherishing this suspicion of motives and seeking to separate our religion from the worldly affairs of common men, the missions have tried to work in these market centers. The people living in these markets are for the most part detached individuals and families. There live the gamblers, the evil-minded, and the social outcasts. Evangelistic work there is rescue work, and so far so good. The only persons from the clan villages to be won are eccentric individuals who have little influence in the clan. The little groups of Christians won by the individualistic method are conglomerates of individuals held together largely by the cement of foreign subsidies. By avoiding relationships with the community life of the clans we have succeeded in preventing the Christian religion from acquiring any influence in the community. The little groups of detached Christians are foreign bodies in the community and they soon become encysted and wholly devoid of any propagating or transforming power. It would be easy to name several scores of places where this is history that covers a period as long as sixty and seventy years. These little groups, maintained only by internal growth and by the occasional addition of an eccentric individual, often contribute generously in proportion to their financial resources, but they are not large enough to provide the total cost of a salaried preacher, and year after year the mission makes up the balance needed, but without any increase in outreach or influence in

the community. In some of the larger cities strong churches have been developed, but there society has been atomized to some extent, communal power has been weakened or destroyed and a sufficient number of individuals could be gathered to form a group large enough to be self-supporting, but even so the influence in the community has not been strong. The lesson seems clear that if the Church is to be established where communal control is strong, it must be by winning the clans and then by Christianizing the life of the clan. The Church must live dangerously, risking the entangling relationships of clan life, in order to transform the clan (Bickers 1977, 65-66).

Pickett came to a similar conclusion in India based upon caste-structures.

In view of the circumstances under which mass movements have developed it is clear that they constitute for many Indian people the most natural way to approach Christ. The more individualistic way preferred in Western countries is not favored by people trained from early childhood to group action. To object to mass movements is to place obstacles in the path along which an overwhelming proportion of Indian Christians, including more than eighty percent of those affiliated with Protestant churches, have come to profess faith in Christ Jesus. We see no reason to believe that any considerable proportion of mass movement converts could have been brought to Christ along any other path. Nor do we see any reason to wish that they might have been led by any other way (Pickett 1933, 330).

In light of such substantial evidence, it becomes necessary to examine carefully an alternative strategy that has become known as the church planting movement strategy.

## **2.3 Evaluation of the Church Planting Movement Strategy as compared to Traditional Mission Strategy**

### **2.3.1 The theological and missiological question of individual conversion and group declaration**

According to Hans Kasdorf, “The question whether conversion is an individual or a group decision or both is a missiological one” (Kasdorf 1980, 99). It should be added that is a theological one as well. The major issue at

stake in people movement theory concerns the validity of the salvation experience of a person making his or her public commitment as part of a group conversion.<sup>42</sup> Is it possible for a group of people<sup>43</sup> to make a valid commitment to the savior hood and lordship of Jesus Christ as one, or is conversion always an individual matter as Western Christians seem to think? Bickers states, “the difference between the two approaches of the one-by-one model and the group-oriented model does not lie at the point of ‘conversion.’ For neither school of thought would be willing to approve mass accessions into the Church where there is no evidence of a genuine saving experience, but only a superficial identification (Bickers 1977, 54). Both approaches insist upon the essential factors of conversion as taught in scripture: (1) an individual recognition of guilt for sin, (2) an individual turning away from known sin in biblical repentance, and (3) an individual faith commitment to God through the person of Jesus Christ.

Much of the criticism aimed at group conversion is based as much on the Western philosophy of individualism as on theological conviction (McQuilkin 1973, 12). Kasdorf explains his use of the term “individualism” in relation to group conversion:

The concept of individualism as used in this study is neither to be equated with the selfhood of a person in society nor with personhood; nor should individualism be identified with the individuality of a person related to his natural and social environments. By individualism here is meant the philosophic concept of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment which holds that the individual is an independent entity in society who has the right to make certain claims on the social community in which he lives. The environment, in turn, has the right to make claims on the individual. But when either of the two dislikes the claim made by the other, then each has the right to refuse to comply, which leads to individual liberty without communal responsibility (Kasdorf 1980, 103-04).

The renown theologian Emil Brunner has called the western philosophy of individualism “a ‘Robinson Crusoe’ affair, expressed in abstract terms.” According to Brunner, this is “an attempt to interpret the individual human

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<sup>42</sup> i.e. a simultaneous declaration by a group of persons in some family or local social unit that they are moving together into the Christian faith and that they desire to be baptized together in community.

<sup>43</sup> The term “group” is used in different contexts to refer to a family, a clan, a caste, a tribe, a homogenous unit in society, or an entire social subsystem.

being solely in the light of his own personality, and the society as the coalescence of such individuals” (Brunner 1947, 294).

Western individualism now dominates Christian thinking in the western world with many well-meaning Christians holding it as a highly valued spiritual heritage deriving from the Puritans and Pietists. Kasdorf claims that Christian individualism is a contradiction in terms:

Individualism has so profoundly shaped the American church concept that we find it difficult to conceive of the church as little more than a class of people consisting of ‘saved’ or ‘converted’ or ‘redeemed’ individuals whose primary concern it is to retain their ‘individual rights,’ as though they had no communal and relational responsibility. Such a philosophy is a contradiction in terms. Just as the physical world does not exist of, nor can it be explained by, isolated atoms, so society cannot exist of individuals in isolation. If we apply this principle to the church of believers as the body of Christ, which exists as a real, visible, sociological entity in the larger society, then we may say that the individual as such does not and cannot exist at all, save in responsible relationships, and that the very concept of the believing individual implies and includes that of the believing community (Kasdorf 1980, 104-05).

Church planting movement strategy acknowledges that salvation is truly a matter of personal faith commitment to Jesus Christ on the part of the individual in direct response to the love of God through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and insists that in this alone is a person forgiven, redeemed, and assured of eternal life. But it insists that the believer be allowed to recognize that in becoming Christ’s disciple he or she does not by necessity cease to love or respect his family and elders. His or her entrance into the community of believers in Christ should not necessarily mean that he or she will no longer be obedient to those in authority over them or that they will no longer be loyal to the best interests or solidarity of their community. Speaking on personal conversion, R. Kenneth Strachan states:

In dealing with the subject of individual salvation it is necessary to keep in mind that no man lives to himself, that growth and fellowship and service and witness are necessarily experienced in relationship to community and society. But to define salvation as participation in the collective ministry of the church, is to ignore that vast portion of Scripture in which salvation is defined in terms of the new birth and sonship or moral perfection and fellowship with God, and which sees

the salvation of one single soul as of infinite value in the eyes of God (Strachan 1968, 115).

These statements bring us to the conclusion that conversion is personal, but not individualistic. In other words, conversion is experienced individually with eternal implications, but it affects the entire group. It is experienced in a vertical relationship but expressed within the context of horizontal dimensions.

Kenneth Cragg gives insight to this issue from among the Muslim peoples of Pakistan:

Baptism is the signification to the old community that the person has actually departed from the community and has entered another. This fact has led some of our contemporaries to question the wisdom or even the rightness of isolated individual baptism. We may be wrong when we administer baptism as a seal of individual confession without regard to how the form is understood in the community to whom we seek yet to witness. "The baptism of the one cannot be in disconnection with the evangelizing of the many. . . . We cannot administer baptism without patient relation to the potential misunderstanding of the watching, often apprehensive community." Since Muslim society is communal rather than individualistic, it might also be true that the individual is not the appropriate unit of baptism. Perhaps until baptism can be understood as something other than that which makes one alien, makes one cease to be native, it might be wise to exercise patience along this line. Perhaps baptism should be held in abeyance, at least until the time when a number can be baptized together (Cragg 1965, 125).

The real point of comparison is which approach promotes the greater spread of the gospel of Christ among the host people group, thereby expanding more expeditiously the Kingdom of God.

### 2.3.2 The alternative model of the Church Planting Movement strategy

Whereas traditional mission strategy has focused on what has been termed an individualistic approach, the church planting movement strategy emphasizes conversion, baptism, and discipleship within the group dynamic of decision-making and communal life. Hiebert tells us, "We must adapt our methods of church planting to the way the society is organized or we will find little response to the gospel" (Hiebert 1995, 158). In listing ten

common factors or characteristics of church planting movements, Garrison includes communal implications of evangelism.

Unlike the predominant pattern in the West with its emphasis on individualism and personal commitment, Church Planting Movements typically rely on a much stronger family and social connection. Missionaries in CPMs have recognized this and urged new believers to follow the web of their own family relationships to draw new believers into the community of faith. In many cases, the churches come to consist of family units and are led by the family's head (Garrison 1999, 37-38).

Acknowledging the significance of these communal implications, care must be taken not to do anything that will hinder group response. Tippetts conveys Christian Keysser's description of the beginning stages of a people movement in New Guinea, in which the delayed baptism of the first two converts eventually led to a group movement:

Two young men earnestly desired baptism, but as the tribe was strongly against it they were told to wait, to their great grief. But in their respective villages both became preachers of penitence and their words stirred men's hearts, and after some years their goal was attained. A great tribal meeting took place, and after much discussion the whole tribe announced its decision through a parable. Every one took a flaming torch. One cried aloud: "We will give up the old bad life. The pagan fire is extinguished. May God kindle a new one for us." With these words they dashed their torches on the ground and extinguished them. The whole assembly gave loud assent to the vows thus taken (Tippetts 1938, 405-6).

Both from a theoretical and practical viewpoint of the historical-cultural milieu of the Hindu caste system, it is evident that there are major differences in the results produced by the implementation of these two approaches to evangelization of unreached peoples.

The Church Planting Movement strategy is concerned with the action and behavior of the individual but within the framework of group-orientation. For that reason, group conversion may be better termed "multi-individual decision"<sup>44</sup> or perhaps still better, "multipersonal conversion."<sup>45</sup> Costa Rican theologian, Orlando Costas, explains multi-individual decisions:

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<sup>44</sup> "Multi-individual decision" is the term used by Alan Tippetts of Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission in his landmark work, *People Movements in Southern Polynesia: A Study in Church Growth*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1971.

The concept of multi-individual decisions gives a sociological orientation to the experience of conversion because it affirms that conversion, which depends on a personal act of faith in Christ, can take place in a group setting, where all the members of a given group (family, clan, tribe, or mutual interest group) participate in a similar experience with Christ after considering it together and deciding to turn to Christ at the same time (Costas 1974, 128).

Regarding the implementation of an alternative mission strategy in Malawi, Bickers states “no single missionary philosophy or strategy can guarantee the ensuing results in the lives of the individuals and the churches that are produced. The approach pursued is only one of the many factors present” (Bickers 1977, 76). While it is true that there is no way to guarantee that the group-oriented conversion approach will inevitably produce indigenous churches of sufficient strength to extend themselves exponentially along the natural lines of social strata in the culture, the people-movement approach offers the greatest potential for long-term impact among peoples of communal societies. Pickett’s conclusion on the matter is:

One of the most important lessons of this study is that conversion of groups of individuals, continued residence of converts amongst their fellows, proper instruction of new converts, adequate use of leaders from amongst the caste being converted, and many other factors combine to form a pattern of action which definitely encourages the initiation and growth of people movements. One way of Christianization permits and encourages groups of families from within the same people to come to salvation without social dislocation in a constant and ever-widening stream. Whereas another way of Christianization permits and encourages individuals of many peoples having been torn from their societies, to come to salvation in an intermittent and gradually diminishing trickle (Pickett 1933, 63-64).

#### *2.3.2.1 Characteristic effects of Individualistic-Oriented Evangelism*

Those won as individuals separate from their group are estranged from their own people and own natural community, leaving them in need

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<sup>45</sup> Hans Kasdorf of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary settled on this term following discussion with Dr. Charles Kraft of Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission (Kasdorf 1980, 116).



and search of some kind of substitute social existence. Pickett describes the potential negative result from such a situation:

That process has produced many unfortunate, and not a few tragic, results in the lives of those most deeply concerned. It has deprived the converts of the values represented by their families and friends and made them dependent for social support to the good life and restraint on evil impulses upon men and women, their colleagues in the Christian faith, with whom they have found it difficult to develop fellowship and a complete sense of unity. It has sacrificed much of the convert's evangelistic potentialities by separating him from his people. Lastly, it has produced anemic Churches, that know no true leadership and are held together chiefly by common dependence on the Mission or the missionary (Pickett 1938, 34-35).

Cragg describes the frustration that new converts under traditional strategy experience in Pakistani society:

When Muslims have turned to Christ they have done so in ones or twos. This has entailed, in the great majority of cases, alienation of the convert from the community of which he has been a part since birth. The resultant upheaval in the life of the individual is hard for a Westerner to appreciate, for Pakistani Muslim society, as well as other oriental societies is communal, not individualistic. For a Muslim, alienation from the community means that he is barred from inheriting from his relatives and stands to lose his wife and children. He faces the loss of a job, the difficulty of finding another one, and the possible danger of physical harm. Now the only possible compensation for such an appalling loss and social ostracism is to be welcomed wholeheartedly into the fellowship of a living and loving Christian church. It is true that Christ recognized the possibility of having to leave "house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother,"<sup>46</sup> but he also recognized that no such individual could carry on in isolation (Cragg 1965, 124).

Those won in isolation from their family and natural community may be convinced of the rightness of their individual Christian commitment but will not be released from a sense of social obligation to their own kinship web.

When individual converts are united in their faith for purposes of fellowship and protection from persecution, they represent a variety of

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<sup>46</sup> The biblical reference is from Mark 10:29.

cultural and societal norms. They lack the unity that comes from the extended kinship web of natural relationships. In addition, their children will be increasingly detached from the thoughts and ways of their kinship web. Hiebert is helpful at this point:

Western missionaries, reared in a culture that stresses individualism and personal choice, often misunderstand such decisions [group conversion]. Many of them as people go back and then come to Christ one by one. In doing so they say to people that this is an unimportant decision, for only minor decisions are made by individuals. Moreover, people often feel rejected by the missionary and return to their old religion (Hiebert 1995, 159).

### *2.3.2.2 Characteristic effects of People Movements*

There are several notable characteristics of those who become Christians as part of a group movement.

1. *Communal Discipleship.* A people movement introduces the neophyte into Christianity through an already integrated group structure as he or she experiences conversion in the context of his or her own community. Discipleship or growth in Christian maturity is the logical outcome of the individual decision to follow Christ since the new believer will be doing so along with his or her extended family and the familiar environment of those among whom he or she has lived since childhood. The new believer has heard the gospel within his or her own heart-language. Instruction in the Christian life is learned both by daily observation and daily participation with family and close friends. In this way, he or she is “baptized along with others in his [or her] own household – husbands and wives together, parents and friends together, friends together” (Bickers 1977, 87). In other words, spiritual maturity becomes the shared experience of the “household” (*oikos*). Speaking of the quality of such communal discipleship, Pickett writes:

We are persuaded that the quality of faith and experience is very much better in the areas where group or mass movements have taken place than in areas where converts have been won by independent, individual decision. In Andhra Desa we interviewed hundreds of converts of more than forty castes. In a high proportion of such interviews we heard convincing testimonies of personal and family experiences in the grace of Jesus Christ. A typical testimony was given by an aged Erukula woman. “I did not want to be a Christian until my sons and all the rest of our community urged it. They had more sense than I did and I agreed to follow them. Now I am glad, for

my sins have all been washed away. Every day I talk to Jesus, my Saviour, and He gives me joy” (Pickett 1938, 40).

2. *Pure Motives.* A people movement that develops under its own God-directed leadership and power apart from missionary assistance to individuals creates less confusion about motivation for conversion. Discipleship is measured most clearly in terms of changes of inner character, by Spirit fullness, in Christ-likeness, and in renewal by the power of God, rather than by position, financial aid, employment, or other material benefits.

3. *Communal Life.* Although describing people movements from the perspective of East Africa in Malawi, Bickers’ words apply well to people movements irrespective of geographic orientation:

In people movements, persons tend to remain in vital relationship with their family and community leaders. Becoming Christian in a local people movement enables persons to receive the spiritual values of the Christian faith while, at the same time, continuing to participate in the physical and social necessities of their traditional community life (Bickers 1977, 89).

As converts have not found it necessary to leave their kinship web to find their Christian faith, now they are not required to leave their group to live a Christian life, demonstrating the validity of their family loyalties. Converts within people movements both receive and share such things as physical care in time of illness, food in times of drought, shelter in times of disaster, protection in times of danger, consolation in times of death, celebration in times of new birth, as well as participation in marriage and other rites of initiation. In other words, continuation in the community preserves their vital social connection with the group and allows them to enrich the life of the entire group by their Christian faith and character.

#### *2.3.2.3 Characteristic effects of People Movements on Churches*

Like individuals, churches assume characteristics and take on personality patterns, especially when the churches arise from such variant backgrounds and methodologies as do the churches in India. With the complexities of life and culture in India, it would be oversimplification to distill the differences among churches in India down to only one factor; however, churches in India may be

divided accurately into one of two categories.<sup>47</sup> The first of these has been described by Pickett, McGavran, and others as “mission-station churches.” Another designation is that of “non-indigenous” churches. These generally congregate in a building owned or built by some mission organization, many times complete with concrete floors, doors and windows, chairs, and even a Western-style pulpit. It is quite common to find hymnbooks, Bibles, and Sunday School literature. Leaders of these churches appear to be more literate and capable than others, often resembling the missionary responsible for his or her training and perhaps employment.<sup>48</sup> In essence, church leaders and church buildings themselves become missionary-designed but inadequate imitations of their counterparts in the West. Leadership in the “gathered-station church” finds it difficult to relate to indigenous forms of authority, discipline, and decision-making. Having come as individuals from numerous families, clans, tribes, villages, or castes, they are disconnected from the familiar communal system upon which they may have depended most of their lives for stability and guidance. Consequently, a majority of these mission-station churches gravitate toward the missionary as a hybrid father, counselor, chief, and medicine-man. This goes against what Gailyn Van Rheezen describes as healthy identification that is “participation in the lives of people not as benefactors but as co-laborers” (Van Rheezen 1991, 117). While directed toward animistic contexts, Van Rheezen provides a helpful analysis of the missionary’s status and dangers of an inappropriate role:

A missionary’s status and accompanying roles must be worked out in relationship to categories already existing in the host culture. . . . He must avoid negative statuses like colonialist, landlord, policeman and reformer, spiritual father, administrator, or technician<sup>49</sup> and instead seek positive statuses concurrent with being God’s emissary in the new culture. What are some of the positive statuses available to the

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<sup>47</sup> For a fuller examination of the complexities among churches in India, consult Donald A. McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from India*, Pasadena, California: William Carey Library Publishers, 1979. McGavran identifies Indian churches according to five basic types that he designates: Syrian churches, Fully conglomerate churches, Monoethnic churches from caste, Monoethnic churches from tribe, and Modified multiethnic churches. He further distinguishes the churches according to four secondary types: Urban conglomerates, Urban monoethnics, the Great conglomerates, and the Indigenous churches.

<sup>48</sup> The author witnessed this repeatedly in East Africa in general and Kenya in particular, as well as in India.

<sup>49</sup> Here Van Rheezen references Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, 261-73; and Jacob A. Loewen, *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective*, Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1975, 434-40.

missionary within the context of animistic cultures? Almost all societies have some category called learner. For example, while making a dialect survey among the Choco of Panama, Jacob Loewen assumed the role of “a young man getting to know the world” (Loewen 1975, 439). Accepting some status defined by the English word *learner* helps the missionary comprehend how the people think, how their animistic world is ordered, and how to communicate the message of God’s work in Jesus Christ within the new context. As the church becomes better established, the missionary is tempted to adopt the status of priest, the authoritative representative of an established religion. However, there are dangers in an outsider’s becoming an institutional religious leader. It would mean that problems of discipline would be handled by an outsider. It would be an outsider who would define God’s morality and ethics for the host people. One born and raised in another culture would determine Christian alternatives to traditional marriage and coming-of-age ceremonies. Such a priestly role for a missionary appears paternalistic . . . (Van Rheenen 1991,166-68).

Engel and Dyrness describe the negative aspects of “westernized approaches” exhibited in mission-station churches:

The result is that: (1) often local churches are alienated within their culture because they bear the stamp of a non- biblical “western” brand of Christianity; (2) people make “decisions” but are not converted because they are unable to comprehend satisfactorily the demands of the Gospel, and thus they end up as quasi-Christians; (3) countless man hours of missionary evangelistic activity have been wasted which could have been genuinely productive in extending the kingdom of God among the world’s populace (Engel 2000, 149).

The second type of church for consideration is often termed an “indigenous” church. Something is indigenous when it is produced, flourishes, or lives naturally within a distinct cultural identity and expression. “William Carey, more than 150 years ago, while yet with only a handful of converts, laid far-sighted plans for the organization of the Indian Church, with local pastors and evangelists working under the supervision of the foreign missionaries. He saw already that, as the Church grew, and as doors for the Gospel opened in the non-Christian world, the work would far

exceed the powers of the missionaries themselves” (Beyerhaus and Lefever 1964, 10). Though not all missionaries agreed, there were those who saw this as more than just a question of the overburdened missionary including national works for the sake of expedience. They understand a theological necessity if not cultural mandate to encourage the natural or indigenous expression of Christianity under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This approach was as old as the ministry of the Apostle Paul himself. Scherer explains:

Paul eschewed the task of translating this spirit-filled community into formal organizational terms. He prescribed no model constitution to his congregations. He handed on liturgical traditions but did not fix forms of worship. He laid down no binding doctrinal statement. He made no attempt to introduce ecclesiastical patterns from Jerusalem or Antioch into Ephesus and Corinth. It appears that Paul was content to leave wide areas of the process of church formation to be completed by the Holy Spirit. He likened his task to that of sowing seed, or laying a foundation. He knew that God brings the seed to harvest, and finishes the edifice. The apostles never lost sight of the difference between the specific task of gospel witness, committed to them by Jesus Christ, and the process of church formation. They preached the gospel of the kingdom everywhere. The Spirit begot the church (Scherer 1964, 77-78).

These thoughts lie behind the policy of Rufus Anderson<sup>50</sup> to create and indigenous ministry:

Heathen nations must be rendered independent of Christendom for their religious teachers as soon as possible (Beyerhaus and Lefever 1964, 11).

Henry Venn<sup>51</sup> agreed that the goal of every missionary should be to resign all pastoral work into the hands of an indigenous ministry and church. These two men communicated frequently with one another and together formulated the missionary task as that of ‘preparing the new churches for self-government,’ ‘the settlement of a Native Church under Native Pastors upon a self-supporting system,’<sup>52</sup> and encouraging churches to achieve self-

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<sup>50</sup> Rufus Anderson was Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Venn served as Secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society from 1841 to 1871.

<sup>52</sup> This statement was formulated as Point 10 of his Memorandum of 1851. Venn issued another Memorandum ten years later, in 1861, embodying stricter instructions to missionaries and a more developed program of church development, in which he instructed missionaries to limit themselves to evangelistic work and not to become involved in church administration.

support and multiply themselves through self-propagation. Although their proposals differed in certain respects since one is Anglican and the other Congregationalist, they agreed in their definitions of the characteristics of 'truly independent native churches.'

These characteristics of indigenous churches, known as the 'three-self formula,' were: "self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating." Charles Brock offers the following description of an indigenous church:

Since the *indigenous church* is the object of the work of the church planter, a clear definition of the term is now in order. It is commonly accepted that an indigenous church is: 1. self-governing; 2. self-supporting; 3. self-propagating. Therefore, an indigenous church administers its own affairs under the Lordship of Christ. Second, an indigenous church provides its own financial support from its members. Third, an indigenous church, out of loving concern, begins other new churches. There is little or no room for flexibility or alteration of these three basic principles. To take away any one of the three makes a church weak, one that falls short of the New Testament pattern.

The indigenous church is a goal and not a method. The goal remains fixed and attainable by various methods. It should be strongly emphasized that certain indigenous methods lead more easily to the goal (Brock 1981, 12).

Tippett advances an expansion of the three-self formula to include three other virtues, concluding that there is really a six-fold criteria for indigeneity. He states these criteria as follows:

1. Self-image – the church is a valid entity and not the child of a fatherly mission.
2. Self-functioning – the church is a complete body that has all its necessary parts and can carry on all its essential functions.
3. Self-determining – the church is an autonomous body capable of making its own decisions and policies.
4. Self-supporting – the church has sufficient understanding of stewardship and capacity to support itself and carry out its own projects without outside funding.
5. Self-propagating – the church is committed to its own share in fulfilling the Great Commission.
6. Self-giving – the church renders its own ministry of love and service in the world (Tippet 1973, 154-59).

These additional virtues may be summarized by the heading of “self-expression.”

As important as the triune formula has been in missionary thinking, this fourth category undoubtedly stands among them with equal significance to the indigenization of the church. Self-expression has to do with the cultural relevance of the Gospel in the cultural forms of the particular society, especially with reference to its communication, art forms, and worship (Bickers 1977, 98).

Hiebert makes a statement and asks a vital question related to something he calls “the fourth self.”

After much discussion about the three “selves,” there has emerged a general consensus that young churches must be allowed to mature and take responsibility for the work of God in their regions as soon as possible. But little is said about the fourth self—self-theologizing. Do young churches have the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves? (Hiebert 1985, 195-96).

The point is that the churches with the highest likelihood of becoming truly indigenous by whatever definition and however many “selves,” are clearly the ones resulting from people or group movements.

In case studies of church planting movements in India that follow in chapter four, one encounters repeatedly the principles of indigeneity as set forth by Venn, Anderson, Tippet, and others; for this is essentially the type of church produced by church planting movements—one that becomes self-governing, self-supporting, and self-reproducing—when a church is left to itself to develop naturally within a specific communal context. Ponraj prefers the term contextualization to indigenization with regard to church planting in Indian context. He quotes from the Asia Theological Association’s Declaration on Contextualization:<sup>53</sup> “It is a term [that] points to a wider horizon of theological concern than the term ‘indigenization’. It takes into account various socio-political issues such as poverty, economic and political oppression, violence and war, racism, sexism and casteism” (Ponraj 1991, 37). Pickett’s observations of a people movement among the Gara of India form a fitting conclusion to our consideration of the effects of people movements upon churches:

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<sup>53</sup> The term “contextualization” was introduced in 1972 by Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsejian, directors of the Theological Education Fund.



All these features recounted in the paragraphs above mean that Christianity is felt by the people to be their own religion and thus flourishes. We are continually impressed by the degree to which rural group conversion churches, because of their inevitable and unavoidable integration with the life of the people, are understood by the surrounding peoples (Pickett, Warnshuis, Singh, and McGavran 1956, 24).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY CONNECTED TO BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **3.2 The New Testament Oikos as a basis for Church Planting Movement Strategy**

##### **3.2.1 Introduction**

Garrison lists ten characteristics found frequently in church planting movements and says that in most church planting movements “we are seeing most if not all of these factors” (Garrison 1999, 37). Although not listed in any particular order of priority or frequency, the second characteristic is that “Evangelism has communal implications.”

Unlike the predominant pattern in the West with its emphasis on individualism and personal commitment, Church Planting Movements typically rely on a much stronger family and social connection. Missionaries in CPMs have recognized this and urged new believers to follow the web of their own family relationships to draw new believers into the community of faith (see Acts 16:31-32). In many cases, the churches come to consist of family units and are led by the family’s head (ibid, 37-38).

What Garrison describes as a frequently seen characteristic of CPMs is better understood as part of the biblical foundation and the very fabric of multi-individual movements to Christ. This characteristic is wrapped up in the New Testament reality of *oikos*.

##### **3.2.2 The meaning of *oikos* in the New Testament**

Several usages of *oikos* are to be noted in Scripture. According to Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, *oikos* has three primary meanings: 1. “a house,” which may mean “an inhabited house,” “any building whatever,” or “any dwelling place”; 2. “the inmates of a house, all the persons forming one family, a household”; 3. “stock, race, descendants of one” (Thayer 1979, 441). Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich discuss various aspects of *oikos*. In general Greek and Hellenistic usage *oikos* means “house” or “dwelling” and often “temple.” But *oikos* may also mean “domestic affairs” or “possessions” as well as “family” or “family property.” *Oikos* is a favorite word in the LXX and can denote the

“family,” “race,” or “sanctuary.” In the New Testament, the Christian community is called the *oikos tou theou* (Heb 3:6; 1 Pe 4:17; 1 Tim 3:15) and the *oikos pneumatikos* (1 Pe 2:5). Gnostics and Philo used the image of “dwelling” or “house” metaphorically to describe the dwelling place of the soul. *Oikos* is also seen as an early Christian image for the community. “In the OT ‘my house’ refers to Israel itself, so that the NT exegesis reminds us of the equation of ‘house of God’ and the community” (Kittel 1974, 125). The *oikos pneumatikos* is contrasted with the Temple in Jerusalem and Christians are fitted into it as living stones (*lithoi zontes*, 1 Pe 2:4ff; Eph 2:22). “Distinctive Hebrew modes of expression explain the fairly common NT phrase ‘house of Israel’” with the reference being to the whole people or race of Israel (ibid, 129). The final usage of *oikos* described by Friedrich is “The ‘house’ as a group in the structure of the Christian community”:

Primitive Christianity structured its congregations in families, groups and “houses.” The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting. Thus we read of the house of Stephanas in 1 Co 1:16, the house of Philemon in Philemon 2, the house of Cornelius in Acts 11:14, the house of Lydia in Acts 16:15, the house of the prison governor in Acts 16:31, 34. Acts 18:8 also refers to the faith of Crispus and his whole house. It is also likely that the house of Onesiphorus in 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19 is a house fellowship of this kind. In this regard we read expressly in Acts 2:46 that they broke bread by house (*kat’ oikon*), and the summary in Acts 5:42 says that they taught and proclaimed the good news in the temple and in houses (*kat’ oikon*). It is explicitly emphasized that the conversion of a man leads his whole family to the faith; this would include wife, children, servants and relatives living in the house (ibid, 119-130).

The primary meaning of *oikos* in the New Testament relates to the idea of extended family and possessions and is usually translated, “household.” Under the old Attic law, *oikos* was the whole estate, while *oikia* referred to the physical dwelling only. Later, that distinction was lost in the Greek as there are several places in the New Testament where *oikia* actually means “the inhabitants of a house.”<sup>54</sup> “Greco-Roman political writers understood the household to be the basic building block of the state. Cities, they observed, are composed of households” (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 123). The importance of the *oikos* was such that secular ethicists felt

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<sup>54</sup>Matthew 12:25

the stability of the city-state depended upon responsible management of the *oikos* or household.

The foundational nature of this institution is further seen in the pattern it provided for the structure and definition of larger political institutions. The emperor came to be viewed as a father and the state as his household. And many functions or positions in relation to the state were derived from the “household” root: *metoikoi/paroikoi* (“resident aliens”), *oikeios* (“native”), *katoikoi* (“military colonists”), *dioiketes* (“chief financial officer”), *oikonomos* (“administrator”) (Johnston 1903, 417).

Some political philosophers specified the meaning of household in terms of three relational pairs: husbands and wives, fathers and children,<sup>55</sup> and masters and slaves.<sup>56</sup> Johnston states, “If by our word family we usually understand a group of husband, wife, and children, we may acknowledge at once that it does not correspond exactly to any of the meanings of the Latin *familia*, varied as the dictionaries show these to be. . . . Those persons made up the Roman *familia* in the sense nearest to its English derivative, who were subject to the authority of the same Head of the House” (Johnston 1903, 21). These persons in the household commonly included all the slaves and clients and all the property (real and persons) belonging to the head of the household. The household typically extended to include freedmen, laborers, business associates and tenants. While in principle the head of the household (*pater familias*) had full authority over the members of the household, the cohesiveness of the *oikos* depended more upon “the sense of loyalty to the household which stemmed more directly from common economic, social, psychological and religious factors. The household provided members with a sense of security and identity that the larger political and social structures were unable to give” (ibid, 417). An *oikos* then is a social system composed of those who relate to one another through common ties and tasks. *Oikos* members often lived together but always sensed a close association with one another.

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<sup>55</sup> Roman fathers had extraordinary power over their children and most ancient texts are concerned with them and not with mothers.

<sup>56</sup> According to Stambaugh and Balch, “There were more slaves in the Roman empire than in any previous society.” Tensions were surprisingly few between masters and slaves in the time of Jesus and Paul. Although there were debates about how slaves were to be treated, little time was given to discussing the issue of slavery itself. Household slaves were considered part of the extended family and shared in the family’s religious practices. This explains why Jews and Christians addressed slaves directly rather than reflecting about them in the third person (Stambaugh and Balch 1986, 124).

One is unable to understand the ecclesiology of the Apostle Paul apart from noting his understanding of and emphasis upon the *oikos* concept. There are numerous references to the secular *oikos* in Paul's writings.<sup>57</sup> Some of these refer to the place in which believers met for worship.<sup>58</sup> As distinctions between Judaism and early Christianity became more obvious, Christians left the Temple and synagogues in favor of meeting in the homes of certain believers. Paul's subsequent references to churches (*ekklesia*) are most likely to such house churches. Paul's use of household terminology conveys his thinking about God's people in relation to God and one another. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul describes the Ephesian church as the "household of God" (*oikos theou*). Here Paul references the household as a social unit with various members responsible to one another and ultimately the head of the household. To be a household member meant identity as well as the security that accompanies a sense of belonging. So central was the concept of *oikos* to Paul's understanding of *ekklesia* that it determined his view of ministry within the church:

The dominance of the household concept in Paul's thought also influenced his perception of the ministry and the minister. Paul's ministry thus comes under the category of stewardship (*oikonomia*, 1 Co 9:17; Col 1:25), that is, a task entrusted by the master to a member of the household. The one who receives this trust, the minister, is called a "steward" (*oikonomos*, 1 Co 4:1, 2; Tit 1:7). Such a description emphasizes the need for faithful execution of duties and accountability to the master (ibid, 418).

Paul also combines the household metaphor with others in order to describe the church. For example, in Ephesians 2:19-22 alone Paul uses six terms derived from the *oikos* root: *paroikoi*, *oikeioi*, *epoikodomethentes*, *oikodome*, *synoikodomeisthe*, and *katoiketerion*. According to Paul, the same Spirit that indwelt the Jewish Temple now indwells the household of God.

The effect of Paul's use of household imagery is to depict the people of God as God's household, a living and growing family whose life together requires mutuality of service and care, recognition of responsibilities, and a sense of identity, belonging and protection. As a household it would be understood that the community of God's people would be comprised of varieties of people, roles and

<sup>57</sup> *oikia*: 1 Co 11:22; 16:15; Phil 4:22; 1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 3:6; *oikos*: Rom 16:5; 1 Co 1:16; 11:34; 14:35; 16:19; Col 4:15; 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:4; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19; Tit 1:11; Philemon 2.

<sup>58</sup> Rom 16:5; 1 Co 16:9; Col 4:15; Philemon 2.

responsibilities, and that to function effectively would need to be maintained (ibid, 418).

In Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul addresses church members according to household role and status (husbands/wives, parents/children, masters/slaves). 1Timothy 2:1-15; 5:1-2; 6:1-2, 17-19; Titus 2:1-3:8 contain teaching that is similar in form. This pattern of teaching suggests a depth of interest in the household on the part of the early church equivalent to that of the pagan ethical writers and sensitivity to social expectations. More importantly, Paul's frequent use of *oikos* and its various related forms reveals Paul's view of the household as the fundamental building block of society and church.

Paul's primary interest was not in the conversion of individuals, but the formation of Christian communities composed of a number of household groups meeting together occasionally. Archaeological evidence reported by J. Murphy-O'Connor confirms that the average household could only have accommodated fifty with difficulty and it is more probable that believers met more regularly as subgroups in smaller numbers (ibid, 885). According to D. J. Tidball in his article "Social Setting of Mission Churches":

The individualism of contemporary Western society would have been quite foreign to the way of thinking in Paul's day. Decisions would have been taken corporately, or more probably, by the leading member of the household on behalf of others. Hence we read of household conversions and baptisms (Acts 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Co 1:16). When such a joint decision was taken it would not necessarily call forth equal acceptance, commitment or understanding by all who were involved. Negatively, the existence of various house churches in any one town would lead to a tendency to division; with one house fellowship owing allegiance to one teacher and others to different teachers. It may be that this is the situation underlying Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Positively, the household was ready-made to serve as the "basic cell" of the church and the primary unit for mission as it used its existing network of relationships outside its own membership to spread the gospel (ibid, 888).

Upon careful study of the book of Acts, it is evident that Luke gives prominence and significance to the idea of *oikos*. Luke uses *oikos* eighty-seven times in his two-volume work originally known as Luke-Acts, most often in connection to conversion to Christianity. Zaccheus, a tax-gatherer, responded to Jesus and Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this

household” (*Eipen de pros auton ho Iesous, Oti semeron soteria to oiko touto egeneto*) (Luke 19:9). Paul taught people publicly and "by households" (*kai didaxai umas demosia kai kat oikous*) (Acts 20:20). Cornelius feared God along with all of his household and the promise that he and his household were saved was given to him by the Spirit of God (*sun panti to oiko autou; kai pas ho oikos sou*) (Acts 10:2 and 11:14). Lydia with her household was baptized (*Os de ebaptisthe kai ho oikos autes*) (Acts 16:15). The Philippian jailer and his entire household believed in the Lord and were baptized (*Oi de eipon, Pisteuson epi ton kurion Iesoun Christon, kai sothese, su kai ho oikos sou. Kai elalesan auto ton logon tou kuriou, kai pasin yois en te oikia autou. Kai paralabon autous en ekeine te ora tes nuktos elousen apo ton plegon, kai ebaptisthe autos kai oi autou pantes parachrema*) (Acts 16:31-33). Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue in the city of Corinth, "believed on the Lord with all his household" (*Krispos de ho archisunagogos episteusen to kurio sun holo to oiko autou kai polloi ton Korinthion akouontes episteuon kai ebaptizonto*) (Acts 18:8). Luke also shows *oikos* as significant in other situations than Christian conversion such as when the disciples broke their bread by households (*Kath emerante proskarterountes homothumadon en to iero, klonteste kat oikon arton, metelambanon trophes en agalliasai kai apheloteti kardias*) (Acts 2:46). Titus' house, which was situated opposite the synagogue in Corinth was used by Paul for ministry (*Kai metabas ekeithen elthen eis oikian tinos onomati Ioustou, sebomenou ton theon, ou he oikia hen sunomoroussa te sunagoge*) (Acts 18:7).

### 3.2.3 The role of *oikos* in Church Planting Movements

#### 3.2.3.1 *Oikos Evangelism*

Peter B. Hammond, professor of anthropology at Indiana University, states that “in most cultures the social systems of greatest importance are based on kinship. Human beings everywhere are born into some sort of family. And almost always this family is important in giving them—literally and figuratively—a start in life: producing them, feeding, clothing, protecting, and educating them, and eventually establishing for them a ‘place’ in society. . . . In most cultures the kin group plays an even more important role [that in America], lasting throughout life as the principal source of the individual’s emotional, economic, social-and frequently supernatural-support, and providing the basis for community organization”

(Hammond 1978, 145-46). Another professor of anthropology, David G. Mandelbaum of the University of California, observes: “Whatever diversity there may be among social groupings the world over, there are at least two types which are found in every human society. The family is one of them—in every land, among every people, the child is ordinarily raised and nurtured within a family. The other type of group universal to humanity... is the local community. Just as no person normally lives all his life alone, devoid of family, so does no family normally live entirely alone, apart from any local group” (Mandelbaum 1991, 146). Mandelbaum goes on to describe a third category he calls “clans” that he considers a cultural universal. He explains that clans “are extensions of the local group...voluntary associations based on common interests...ranging from trade unions and medical associations to bridge clubs and parent-teacher associations. Each of these groupings is held together by a common interest, an interest arising from mutual participation in the same trades, the mutual enjoyment of a game, or mutual problems in relation to a set of children” (ibid, 146).

These and other experts in the field of contemporary anthropology identify three universal units of societies worldwide that are based on the following:

1. Common kinship
2. Common community
3. Common interests

The New Testament *oikos*, when understood as a household, corresponds to what contemporary anthropologists define as the three universal social systems of common kinship, common community, and common interests.<sup>59</sup> In fact, “this phenomenon is not only transcultural, it is transhistorical, reaching across centuries” (Wolf u.p., 1). Ralph Neighbour writes of the sacred nature of *oikos*:

In every culture of the world, the intimacy of *oikos* connections is considered to be sacred. The Chinese have a special word for close friendships, and such bonds are considered to be a sacred thing. In Argentina. I was shown a gourd and a metal tube with holes on one end of it for the drinking of *mate* tea. A most intimate *oikos* custom in their culture is sharing the *mate* by drinking from the same tube. Usually, the ceremony is limited to family members. The Argentine who explained this to me said, ‘Recently, I went to visit a friend who

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<sup>59</sup> See also Paul Hiebert’s discussion of kinship, community, and association: Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976): 221, 243, 257, 261, 263.



was sharing a gourd of *mate* with his wife and children. He paid me the highest honor by inviting me to participate' (Neighbour 1990, 115). This author had a similar experience in working with an unreached people group in northern Kenya by the name of the Borana.<sup>60</sup> More specifically, the author's primary focus was the Borana residents of a village called *Olla D'aba*.<sup>61</sup> In the process of learning Borana language and culture, it was observed that kinship groups within the *olla* would gather occasionally for a special celebration called *buna*. The *buna* or "coffee" is a very important article in the Borana tribe for fulfilling the *aada* or "customs," and the *eebafi jila* or "ceremonies." Coffee is not readily available these days where the Borana live and must be traded for with those from the outside. In the ceremony itself, the dry coffee beans are cracked with the teeth and the whole ceremony itself is called *buna qala*: "the sacrificing or killing of the coffee." The coffee is then roasted in butter or oil and is then poured into a bowl with milk in it. Next, the wooden bowl with the coffee is given to one of the elders to be blessed. But before the blessing and distribution of the coffee, everyone takes some of the oil or butter and puts it on the forehead as a blessing and anointment. The rest of the butter is to be rubbed on one's legs, arms, etc. This anointing with the oil or butter has the same significance as taking part in an animal sacrifice. Sometimes people do not stay for the entire ceremony or the eating of the coffee but will anoint themselves with the butter/oil before going. After the blessing of the elder, the cup is passed to each in turn, from oldest to youngest. Each participant takes a few coffee beans from the cup in their mouth and chews them before drinking of the liquid and passing the cup to another, hence the term "eating the coffee." Following the eating of the coffee, the members of the *olla* then sit and discuss the wonders of *Waq* or "God."<sup>62</sup> The significance of the *buna* relates to the importance of *oikios* among the Borana. Some examples show the significance:

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<sup>60</sup> The author worked with this people group as a missionary of the International Mission Board from 1994-1998.

<sup>61</sup> *Olla* may mean a "village" or simply a "group of houses together." A *Borana* village may be very small with only a few huts, or it may be rather large with up to forty houses. The head of the village is called *abba olla*, or literally, "the village father" (Leus 1995, 631).

<sup>62</sup> *Waq* may mean God, sky, or atmospheric conditions. "For the Borana, the whole universe is one and enclosed. They do not think in different distances in connection with stars and planets. So the sky is the most important part of the universe because from here comes rain and thus life: *yo Waaqi dumansa hinqamne, qulla eja*: "when there are no clouds, God is naked" (Leus 1995, 828).

1. One never has coffee or the *buna* alone. It is always shared with others of the closely interconnected *olla* of which he or she is a part.
2. When a Borana man asks for a girl in order to marry her (*duubra bunaani kadhatani*) it is impossible to ask for her without taking coffee to the girl's family and every time her family prepares coffee it is shared with all the members of their *olla*. It is also required to hold the *buna* on the day of the wedding.
3. When there is a sacrifice (*sorio*) there always will be a coffee ceremony. When someone is too poor to sacrifice an animal, the animal may be replaced by coffee as the *sorio*.
4. When the Borana move from one place to another, they first hold the *buna* before building the house.
5. The *buna* is an integral part of the naming ceremony for children.
6. When a person dies, after the burial there will be a coffee ceremony for those of the deceased's *olla* but without the blessing of the bowl.
7. The Borana say: *nageni keena baala kuma*: "we have peace as the leaves of the coffee tree."

It is clear that the *buna* has societal as well as religious significance for the Borana and illustrates the extreme interconnectedness of the *oikos*, or in this case—*olla*.<sup>63</sup>

The early church used the interlocking social system of *oikos* (common kinship, community, and interest) as the basis for communicating the gospel of Christ. The basic thrust of New Testament evangelism was not individualistic but communal. Michael Green confirms that "the (*oikos*) family understood in this broad way, as consisting of blood relations, slaves, clients and friends, was one of the bastions of Greco-Roman society. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the Gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness. [We are, then,] quite right in stressing the centrality of the *oikos* household to Christian advance" (Green 1970, 210). The early church spread rapidly and naturally by means of *oikos*—circles of influence and association—unencumbered with the unnatural experience of "forced evangelism; going reluctantly, flinchingly and embarrassingly door-to-door to encounter people they did not know, to

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<sup>63</sup> It was a sacred honor for this writer to participate numerous times in the *buna* with members of *Olla D'aba* and to eventually be accepted as one of the *olla* and given the Borana name, *Jilo*, which means "festival, feast, or celebration."

explain a message which the first time often did not make sense, to an audience totally uninterested or unfriendly” (Wolf u.p., 2). Thomas A. Wolf, former chair of missions at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, makes an appropriate observation in light of all that has been mentioned above: “*Oikos* evangelism is the God-given and God-ordained means for sharing our supernatural message” (ibid, 3). George Peters concludes the same: “Household evangelism and household salvation are the most basic biblical and cultural approaches and expectations and need revival in our days” (Peters 1988, 147).

### 3.2.3.2 A Biblical Case Study of *Oikos* Evangelism

Although numerous examples could be cited, one specific case study of *oikos* evangelism in the New Testament will suffice. This study comes from the conversion experience of Cornelius. All that we know of Cornelius is contained in the Book of Acts (chapters 10 and 11). A centurion was a Roman army officer, theoretically in charge of a hundred men. Several centurions are mentioned in the New Testament (Matt 8:5 = Luke 7:2; Matt 27:54 = Luke 23:47; Acts 10:1; 22:25; 23:17, 23; 22:23; 27:1), and they are consistently portrayed favorably. Cornelius is called a God-fearer--that is to say, he was a monotheist, a Gentile who worshipped the One God. The Jews traditionally recognized that such Gentiles had a place in the Family of God, and they are mentioned along with the priests (House of Aaron), the Levites (House of Levi), and the Jews or Israelites (House of Israel) in Ps 115:9-13, Ps 118:2-4, and Ps 135:19-20. In New Testament times, an estimated ten per cent of the population of the Roman Empire consisted of God-fearers, Gentiles who recognized that the pagan belief in many gods and goddesses, who according to the myths about them, were given to adultery, treachery, intrigue, etc. The pagan pantheon was not a religion for a thoughtful and moral worshipper who had accordingly embraced an ethical monotheism -- belief in One God, who had created the world, and who was the upholder of the Moral Law. Although only a few of them took the step of formal conversion to Judaism, undergoing circumcision and accepting the obligations of keeping the food laws and ritual laws of Moses and his rabbinical interpreters, most of the God-fearers attended synagogue services regularly.

Cornelius, then, was a Roman centurion, and a God-fearing man. One day, as he was praying, an angel appeared to him and told him to send a

messenger to Joppa and ask Peter to come and preach to him. Peter, meanwhile, was given a vision that disposed him to go with the messenger. When Peter had preached to Cornelius and his family and friends, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on the first Christians at Pentecost (Acts 2), and they began to speak in other tongues. Thus, there was ample evidence to convince Jewish Christians who hesitated to believe that it was the will of God that Gentiles should be brought into the Church.

Cornelius was the first Gentile converted to Christianity, and Luke, clearly regards it as an event of the utmost importance in the history of the early Church, the beginning of the Church's decision to admit Gentiles to full and equal fellowship with Jewish Christians. What may be of equal significance is the scope of Cornelius' conversion. Scripture clearly states that Cornelius called together his kinsmen and close friends (*Eiskalesamenos oun autous exenisen. Te de epaurion ho Petros exelthen sun autois, kai tines ton adelphon ton apo tes Ioppes sunelthon auto. Kai te epaurion eiselthon eis ten Kaisareian ho de Kornelios hen prosdokon autous, sunkalesamenos tous suggeneis autou kai tous anagkaious philous*) to hear Peter and the other Christian brothers from Joppa (Acts 10:23-24). When Cornelius states, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us," he is referring to this gathering of relatives and close friends (Acts 10:33). Upon receiving forgiveness of sins in Christ's name (Acts 10:43), the Holy Spirit came upon "all who heard the message" (Acts 10:44). These same persons were then baptized in the name of Christ and personally taught by Peter for several more days (Acts 10:47-48). Each of these references to the group must refer to Cornelius together with his kinsmen and close friends. Earlier, when Cornelius sent two household servants and a trusted soldier to entreat Peter to come to Cornelius' home, they said: "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." The servants use the term *ton oikon* in the invitation to Cornelius' home. Evidently, the conversion of Cornelius was accompanied by the conversion of the other members of his household that most likely included relatives, close friends, household servants, and perhaps even certain soldiers. Although he is not mentioned again, he and his household presumably formed the nucleus of the Christian community that we find mentioned later (Acts 8:40; 21:18) in this important city of Caesarea, the political capital of Judea under Herod and the Romans.

### 3.2.4 Strategic implications for India

Personal evangelism, as practiced and understood in the individualistic western world, will never produce a church planting movement among the communal people groups of India, or anywhere else for that matter. Traditionally, the strength of Indian society lies in the extended or joint family. Atul Aghamkar<sup>64</sup> quotes Raghuvir Sinha as follows: “The joint family in Indian society is altogether a different type of institution, which has evolved out of cultural and ethical traditions and prerogatives”<sup>65</sup> (Van Engen 1994, 2). Although the specific expression of extended family in India may vary from place to place, normally they consist of a number of married couples (relatives) and their children living together in the same household. According to Thomas and Devanandan, “A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred” (ibid, 2). Indians place much importance on the family because of its accompanying sense of identity and security.

Important decisions such as marriage and education are decided within the circle of the family of the local community. Decision-making is rarely a private act. The extended family of several generations gives a sense of identity and belonging both to children and to the elderly and in the accord with the biblical understanding of family (ibid, 2).

Pradip Ayer states:

Indian society, comprised of almost four thousand distinct communities (people groups), is still largely made up of united households. In some cases the family members are separated geographically but socially they are united with their larger family, and the elders of the family have strong influence over them. The degree to which decision making is part of a family process is

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<sup>64</sup> The Rev. Aghamkar ministered in two cities in central India with the Christian and Missionary Alliance as a church planter and pastor and now teaches full time at the Union Biblical Seminary in India. Dr. Atul Aghamkar is the only Indian in the country with a doctor of philosophy degree in urban missions. Atul heads up the department of missions and trains pastors and future pastors, missionaries and evangelists for ministry in India and south Asia.

<sup>65</sup> See Atul Aghamkar, *Family Coherence and Evangelization in Urban India*, in Van Engen, Charles and Jude Tiersma (eds.) *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*. Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1994.

particularly observable in rural India where almost eighty percent of India's population is to be found. The head of the household, either the father or a grandfather, exercises tremendous decisions such as the choosing of life partners for eligible girls and boys, the investment of money, the resolving of interpersonal conflicts, etc. These decisions are made by consultation between adult male members of the family under the authority of the head of the family. Women play a role by privately influencing their male counterparts. It seems that in most Asian... nations united households are prominent in society (Ayer u.p., 2).

The caste system adds complexity to the family in Indian context:

An important aspect of Hindu society which has, in course of history, helped the joint family persist and which has also made it more intelligible and stable is its caste organization— one of the most complex systems in existence. Caste in India is, in fact, an extension of the joint family; it is an inclusive group of families having the same status and role (Sharma 1999,21).

The history of the church in India clearly shows that whenever individuals were encouraged to become Christians along with their *oikos*, people movements have taken place. "It is easily proved from history that the great advances of the Christian faith have generally occurred along the lines of natural kinship relationships" (Greenway 1992, 4). *Oikos* evangelism that is accompanied by church planting can bring large segments of people into the church without alienating them from their kinship webs. Many Indians blame the Christian church for encouraging social disintegration in opposing the caste system and emphasizing individual conversion, and say that the strength of Hinduism is its well-integrated family system. While it is true to say that Hinduism contributes to family cohesion, the same may be said of Christian churches that are planted according to the *oikos* evangelism strategy. Aghamkar relates a personal experience that well illustrates the need to approach evangelization in India according to the *oikos* model:

A young man knocked at my door during my first year of ministry in Nagpur, a city in central India. Shikrant was from a prestigious Lew Patil community. His parents were well-placed middle caste Hindus with a closely knit family structure. Santosh, my younger brother, had introduced Shrikant to Christ while they were studying at the same

school. Shrikant could not continue living with his family after his decision to accept Christ. That is how he landed at my door.

I welcomed Shrikant. Although I was a little surprised to see him, I gave him time to relax. To my amazement, he said, “I have thought a long time about this, but now. . .” He paused and continued with determination, “I have decided to become a Christian.” He indicated his desire for baptism. His decision delighted me. I was so overjoyed that I did not ask many questions. After a few days of teaching, I baptized Shrikant. We did not feel the need to inform his family members about his baptism. We believed Shrikant was an adult and legally could make his own decision. When Shrikant’s parents found out about his baptism, a chain reaction began to ripple through his extended family. His father, along with some elders from his community, came and forcefully removed Shrikant from us. They severed all of his connections with us and with other Christians. His parents and relatives expressed anger and antagonism towards Christianity and the Christian church. Shrikant’s family and relatives joined in protecting him against a so-called “Christian attack.” Consequently, this closed all the doors for communicating the gospel to Shrikant’s family and relatives. Shrikant was one of the first high caste converts I baptized in my early ministry. It saddened me to watch his family take him away. Reflecting on the incident over the next several years, I began to see that Shrikant’s family was not really anti-Christian, nor were they explicitly resistant to the gospel. When a family member was being separated from them in the name of the Christian religion, they united themselves in protecting him and preserving the family’s solidarity. They considered Shrikant’s decision to become a Christian without consulting any family members—especially the elders—a revolt and an insult. They could not tolerate the snatching away of a member of their family. For them it was an attack on their family solidarity. They could not tolerate either Shrikant’s decision to become a Christian or our decision to baptize him without consulting his family members. Shrikant was an inseparable part of their family. As a result, we lost Shrikant, and his family and relatives became very hostile to the gospel. We created resistance to the gospel where initially there may not have been any (Van Engen 1994, 182).

Narayan Vaman Tilak's conversion and baptism, as conveyed by H. L. Richard, are further illustration of the impact of individual conversion upon one's *oiko*. Tilak was baptized on February 10, 1895 in Bombay, in the American Mission Church:

When Tilak left home for Bombay to be baptized he did not even tell Lakshmibai [his wife] where he was going, let alone why. Lakshmibai's record movingly relates over many pages the extreme anguish and despair to the point of death which she felt when Tilak's baptism became known. This heart-rending account must at least be read as a plea to Christians somehow to minimize the misunderstandings involved in conversions to Christianity from high caste Hinduism. Tilak having run off as he did, how could there fail to be misunderstandings (Richard 1998, 33).

Rajendran accepts *oikos* evangelism as the natural means of spreading the gospel and fostering people movements, but does express concern that it not promote an elitist agenda. "Evangelism along people group lines appears to be the New Testament model. But one may oppose it for dividing people on caste and culture lines perpetuating *Varnashrama Dharma*, the elitist Hindu idea of caste. People also tend to stick together as castes even after they become Christians for several generations, which is, of course inconsistent with the picture of the Church as one body, brothers and sisters in Christ" (Rajendran 1998, 74). David Sun Lim advocates this as a specific approach to doing mission. He calls this method "spiritual reproduction through small groups." He argues that the best context for evangelism and outreach, discipleship and spiritual growth is the small group, where the priesthood of all believers can be realized. The small group is the locus where the servant-church model is put into practice (Van Engen 1999, 168).

### **3.3 The New Testament "Man of Peace" as a basis for Church Planting Movement Strategy**

#### **3.3.1 The meaning of "Man of Peace" in the New Testament**

An appropriate starting pointing for any evangelism strategy is to examine the evangelistic approach of Jesus Christ. No clearer example of Christ's strategy may be found than his commissioning of the seventy-two in chapter ten of Luke's Gospel.

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.



He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house” (Luke 10:1-7)<sup>66</sup>

The first thing to note is that Jesus appoints a large number of persons for this evangelistic task. Lenski explains this in terms of expedience: “We take it that he commissioned thirty-five pairs because he wanted the work done quickly (Lenski 1961, 565). Jesus issued a similar commission to the Twelve in Matthew 10, but here he refers to the workers as “lambs” instead of “sheep,” thereby intensifying the thought. Next he forbids any outfitting to encourage the workers to dismiss all care about their physical needs. “He who sends them out will provide for them in all respects. They are to learn complete trust” (ibid, 569). The idea conveyed is that none of these mission teams would enter any house in a town or village randomly or without invitation. The description that bears consideration is Christ’s designation of the “man of peace,” which is literally “son of peace” (*uios eirenes*). This phrase is not known in classical or Hellenistic Greek, indicating that Christ is describing something unique. Robertson describes the statement as “A Hebraism, though some examples occur in the vernacular *Koine* papyri” (Robertson 1930, 145). The grammatical tense is also significant. Christ uses the qualitative genitive to convey the sense that peace with God is the desire of the “son of peace;” a desire that has been wrought by the Old Testament promises or by the preaching of the messengers upon arrival, or simply by divine intervention. I. Howard Marshall explains these details:

... the word ‘peace’ is no longer an empty formality but refers to the peace which is associated with the coming of the salvation of God.... Luke speaks of the presence in it of a ‘son of peace’.... A ‘son of peace’ is an example of an idiom found in Classical and Hellenistic Greek.... The saying does not refer to finding a house in which there are already disciples, but to offering salvation to those who are willing

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<sup>66</sup> New International Version.

to receive it.... Such a person will receive the blessing offered to him (Marshall 1978, 419-420).

A “man of peace” is to be understood as the head of a household (*oikos*) who is

supernaturally predisposed to the Gospel. The “man” may actually be a man or

woman, depending on culture and context. This understanding is in keeping with Robertson’s view that a man of peace “means one inclined to peace, describing the head of the household” (Robertson 1930, 145). If, indeed, New Testament evangelism is best understood as *oikos* evangelism, which is predicated on the understanding of “household”, then the logical starting point is with the head of the household. However, Jesus describes not merely a head of a household but more specifically one that is supernaturally predisposed to the Gospel, one who has been prepared by God in some way to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Afterward, the kinship web and circle of influence of the person of peace accelerates the spread of the gospel and does so in such natural terms that converts are not alienated from their own group and circle of influence. This is the primary ingredient for a church planting movement that far exceeds the normal outcome of random evangelism that approaches isolated individuals and leads to further isolated converts. According to Psalm 37:7:

*Consider the blameless, observe the upright;  
there will be posterity for the man of peace.*

That posterity may mean a church planting movement.

How may we identify the person of peace in any given context? Wolf proposes that the person of peace may be identified by three R’s. “The person of peace (1) is receptive to the Gospel; (2) possesses a reputation to gain attention

for the message among family and community; and (3) effectively refers the bearers of good news to that larger group” (Wolf u.p., 3). The receptive characteristic may be seen in the response of Lydia to Paul’s message on the banks of the river near the gate to the city of Philippi:

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of

Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "Come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (Acts 16:13-15).

This passage not only illustrates the receptive side of the person of peace but also shows that the person of peace may be a woman.

The person of peace is also characterized by reputation, meaning that he or she is recognized by others as an influential person. An excellent example of reputation may be seen in the life of Cornelius:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. . . . The following day he [Peter] arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. . . . So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us (Acts 10:1-2, 24, 33).

This individual may hold tremendous influence over his or her household and that influence may extend into the larger community.

The final characteristic of a person of peace is "referencer." This term describes an individual who recommends, with influence the gospel to others. While this does not mean that the person of peace will always be a prominent person in a given community, but they will be influential. A clear example of the referencing characteristic is seen in the Samaritan woman in John 4:

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him (John 4:28-29).

Wolf also identifies "men of goodwill," those who may be an influential person that recognizes the value of the gospel but does not personally receive and follow Christ. He or she becomes a "protector, promoter and pathway finder" but does not make a personal commitment to Christ (ibid).

### 3.3.2 The role of the Person of Peace in Church Planting Movements

A Southern Baptist missionary in Asia decided to prove the validity of Jesus' strategy when he entered a potentially hostile village:

We prayed, 'God we know that you're at work here or we wouldn't be here. We need a man of peace who will take care of us until we can feel our way around this village and know if it's safe or unsafe.' I started my stopwatch. We walked into the center of the village where the well was. A person approached me out of nowhere and said, 'Have you eaten?' We said, 'Not yet.' He said, 'Well, come to my home.' His name was Li, and he was the person of peace we wanted. I stopped my watch: three minutes, 21 seconds" (Snowden 1998, 12).

According to the article, Li fed them, and properly introduced them to the village elder, and asked the newcomers to pray for the village leader. Soon thereafter the village leader recovered and opened the entire village to the Gospel.

Additional case studies substantiate the person of peace as a common denominator in church planting movements. One such case study is of a church planting movement in a large city in China, where many of the citizens work in the steel mills.<sup>67</sup> The Strategy Coordinator for this city, while in language study, met a young Christian Chinese lady (Martha) who later introduced the Strategy Coordinator to her best friend (Mary). Near the middle of March they (Mary, Martha, and the Strategy Coordinator) had lunch together. It was then that the SC learned that Mary was leading a very fast-growing unregistered church in a suburb town near the target city. She was also teaching Martha. As they talked the SC discovered that Mary was also secretly teaching other believers and house church leaders inside the Strategy Coordinator's target city. As a result of working through an obvious "person of peace," a church planting movement has developed. The response or result is recorded by the Strategy Coordinator as follows:

The result of the heretofore described ministry is as follows: In three months there were more than 1300 professions of faith, with more than 1200 immediate baptisms. In three months there were 3 new church starts, each with approx. 50 new believers. In seven months there were 15 new church starts (inclusive of the above). In nine months there were 25 new church starts (inclusive of the above). In

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<sup>67</sup> This case study is of an unreached people in a highly restricted access region. Therefore, place names are omitted and the names of individuals are changed to protect the identity of those actually involved.

two years and three months there were 57 new church starts. As of November 1997, there have been over 450 church starts scattered throughout three provinces that have roots in the DTC training events.

As of November 1997, there has been over 18,000 professions of faith, more than 18,000 Bibles and countless other materials distributed, at least 35 "Jesus" films being used throughout the territory; more than 450 new church starts, more than 500 house church leaders given specialized training for teaching and leading their people, and over 1,000 other believers have received Christian growth and evangelism training through the DTC. And all of that is fully indigenous and continuing (Snowden 1998, 16-18).

In another unpublished case study of a church planting movement in China, for security purposes, the people and region involved in the church planting movement are identified simply as HN. HN is part of China. The Marxist government does not outlaw Christianity but seeks to control it. Uncontrolled Christianity is illegal and is persecuted through fines, imprisonment, and labor

camp assignment. If enforced, religious policy is in direct opposition to a number of Biblical imperatives. In HN the registered churches are tightly controlled and actively cooperate with the government in persecuting house churches. The registered churches have been stagnant in number and size during the past ten years. There are eighteen churches with four thousand members, about half of whom are active. HNese churches have suffered all of the types of persecution mentioned above as well as martyrdom due to local opposition to their evangelism and church planting efforts (Wickeri 1990, 65-67). HN is an island with an area of 34,000 square kilometers and a population of over 7 million. About 5.5 million of the inhabitants are HNese, with 1.1 million Zhou national minority people, and several smaller minority groups including Miao, Zhuang, and Hui. There is a significant population of mainland Han Chinese in the capital. The people speak HNese, tend to be poorly educated, and are primarily rural. The capital is the largest city and has 500,000 people.

The approach of the Strategy Coordinator substantiates the person of peace and *oikos* evangelism as the foundation of church planting movements:

In pioneer areas, church planters first identified interested individuals using Jesus videos or other tools (with emphasis on heads of households). They then expanded the base of people

to involve in Bible studies by issuing invitations along relational lines through relatives and friends. At the conclusion of a few weeks of witness and simple evangelistic Bible study, they issued an opportunity for conversion. Those who believed immediately began basic discipleship Bible studies for a few more weeks. At the conclusion of those studies the new believers were baptized. The church planters then identified those who were suitable for leadership and immediately turned over all public meetings to them. One of the church planters would stay behind and mentor these leaders, teaching them items, which those leaders in turn taught to the fledgling congregation.

In “established” areas churches reproduced upon reaching a certain size, which was determined by local security issues. In cities or large towns groups would never exceed thirty members. In rural areas some churches became much larger. When a group would divide, some leaders would go with each of the new congregations and new apprentice or assistant leaders would immediately be identified to ensure they would be equipped by the time the group was ready for a new division (Snowden 1998, 20).

The result of this approach among the HN indicates a genuine church planting movement is taking place. The number of churches increased from three with less than 100 members to over a hundred churches with over 16,000 members. At the end of the period there were at least two reproducing churches in each of the five major sub-dialects, each of the nineteen counties, and every minority group with over fifty thousand people. Primarily second, third, and fourth generation churches were planted entirely by local believers intentionally targeting the least evangelized areas and groups. All growth was from adult conversion growth rather than transfer or biological growth. Average reproduction time was six months (Snowden 1998, 22-26).

A third case study comes from this writer’s own experience in northern Kenya among the Borana people group near the town of Marsabit. The desert of Northern Kenya is harsh, desolate and unforgiving, yet where grass and water are scarce, the Borana people herd cattle and goats. There, where sun and heat are abundant and water is not, the Borana people sustain

their culture and rear their children. They live in small family groups far from any urban centers, and their lives revolve around their cattle, family and homes. Holding fast to their traditional animistic beliefs, the Borana worship a god who cannot save them, and Islam is spreading among them. Having been asked by the Baptist Convention of Kenya and the Baptist Mission of Kenya to accept work among the Borana as a secondary missionary assignment, the writer's work among them began in 1995. This work consisted primarily of making the eleven hour drive north of Meru through the Kaisut Desert about every six weeks. Due to the length and difficulty of the trip (pavement ended thirty minutes from home and the remainder of the journey was over rock, dirt, and sand. The path was impassable after any amount of rain) the entire visit usually lasted a week.

This writer's first encounter with the Borana was in a group meeting with the Baptist leaders from Nairobi and the village elders of *Olla D'aba*. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the initial work that had been done among the Borana under the leadership of a Borana Christian by the name of Mohammed Wario. Village elders quickly identified Wario as morally flawed and a man of deceit. This culminated in the head elder<sup>68</sup>, a man by the name of *Tullu*,<sup>69</sup> standing and stating that "all Baptists are liars." It was apparent that the

greatest challenge would be to develop a positive relationship with *Tullu*, the *abba olla* of *Olla D'aba*. At first, visits began with requesting an audience with *Tullu*, each of which required a gift or *daraara* of coffee or tobacco. At least six of these visits were conducted over the next year and a friendship began to develop. Along with personal visitation, relationship building took place by

fulfilling the unmet promises of the first Baptist workers among the Borana of *Olla D'aba* and development projects conducted in conjunction with Food For The Hungry during a time of extreme drought. Several years later, this writer made his final visit to the Borana before leaving the country for a new assignment in India. This visit was destined to be different. Upon arriving at *Olla D'aba*, instead of requesting an audience with *Tullu*, he had sent a messenger to wait for my arrival and deliver a message. The message simply stated that *Tullu* requested an audience with the missionary. When

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<sup>68</sup> *Abba olla*. Literally the father of the village. This usually is the oldest man in the village. "All questions and decisions concerning the community are referred to him, all cases and quarrels are first taken to him" (Leus 1995, 631).

<sup>69</sup> *Tullu* is a common man's name and also means "a ceremonial hut for celebrations" (Leus 1995, 798).

Tullu arrived, he went right to the point. Tullu declared that he had come to accept that what the missionary shared from the Bible was true and that the God the missionary proclaimed was the one true and living God, and that he was ready to follow Him. A few days later in a worship gathering of Borana believers and other interested Borana, Tullu attended. At the conclusion of the meeting he raised his *ule*,<sup>70</sup> indicating that he wished to address the group. Essentially, Tullu told the group the same thing he had said to the missionary but with an added personal challenge. In stating his new-found faith, he challenged everyone else to make the same commitment. Tullu proved to be a man of peace and soon Tullu's extended family was involved to some extent in the church, though not everyone immediately publicly identified with Christ. From the growth of the village church came a missionary vision to reach neighboring villages. The members of the *Olla D'aba* church, with no assistance from the missionary, initiated mission work in two neighboring villages, *Olla Cholola* and *Olla Kukuptirro*. The work has continued to grow since that time.

“This, then, is the logic of the cross: the very act that binds me to God in grace binds me, *simultaneously* (author's emphasis), to my neighbor in acceptance” (Ramachandra 1996, 267). Together, the New Testament significance of the person of peace in evangelistic strategy and its obvious and necessary correlation to *oikos* evangelism form the biblical foundation for church planting movement strategy. “We must be careful in our own strategic planning to recognize the hand of God in the matter of resistance. In some peoples we may see what we consider resistance and may be able to trace it to broad-scale acts of rejection of previously known truth, but there will always be a portion of those people who are prepared to respond. It is to them, by addressing the whole culture broadly, that we are able to announce the gospel” (Woodberry 1998, 9).

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<sup>70</sup> It is customary for a Borana man to travel with his stick (*ule*). In fact, the Borana have a saying: “*ule harka duwa ma deemta?*” which asks, “why do you not have your stick with you?”



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT STRATEGY CONSIDERED IN LIGHT OF SOTERIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING AND CASTE AMONG HINDUS**

#### **4.1 Salvation in Hindu Context**

##### **4.1.1 A brief comparison between conversion and salvation**

As seen in previous chapters, the church planting movement strategy or people group movement strategy exists in relation to the conversion of multiple individuals within a communal or group network of relationships. Conversion is so central to church planting movements that all discussion of missionary strategy must emerge from a clear understanding of conversion dynamics among the related people group. This study is known as “ethno theology, a discipline that seeks to integrate the scientific studies of theology, sociocultural anthropology, history, and psychology with a biblical view of God, humankind, and culture” (Kasdorf 1980, 20-21). The objective of this chapter is ethno-theological; to understand the role of Christian conversion within the specific context of Hinduism and Hindu understanding of salvation, so that appropriate philosophical presuppositions will facilitate a methodological approach that will succeed in evangelizing large groups of individuals, and by its very nature encourage development of authentic people movements among Indians.

Western cultures display many different ideas as to the meaning of conversion and the term conversion *per se* is not unique to Christianity. Secular entities speak of “conversion” (e.g. the United States Energy and Research and Development Administration speaks of the “underground conversion” of coal to synthetic gas.

To the computer technologist, *conversion* may mean the change from one code or symbolic system to another; for a psychoanalyst it may mean the process by which repressed ideas or feelings are represented by bodily change, as a simulated physical illness; for the mathematician it may mean the change in the unit of expression; for the nuclear physicist it may mean the change of one nuclear fuel into another by the process of capturing neutrons; for the carpenter it may mean the remodeling of a bathroom into a den; for the financier it may mean the exchange of a bond into another form of security of equal

value; for the sociologist it may mean the transformation of social status from one level to another; for a religious worker it may mean the substitution of one religion for another; for a theologian it may mean the change from one belief system to another. Thus the word conversion simply implies the process whereby change, transmutation, or transformation in condition, state, position, value or attitude takes place either in the mental, physical, emotional, material, religious, or ethical realm of experience (ibid, 21-22).

Hans K?ng describes the universality of the conversion motif:

Not only Christianity, but also the world religions are aware of man's alienation, enslavement, need of redemption: inasmuch, that is, as they know of man's loneliness, addiction, abandonment, lack of freedom, his abysmal fear, anxiety, his selfish ways and his masks; inasmuch as they are troubled about the unutterable suffering, the misery of this unredeemed world and the sense and nonsense of death; inasmuch as they therefore await something new and long for the transfiguration, rebirth, redemption and liberation of man and his world (K?ng 1976, 92).

David Shank portrays conversion as an “*out-of-into*” experience and Dr. Leon Salzman of Georgetown University says “conversion is a general term for change and generally implies a drastic alteration of a former state” (ibid, 22-23).

While Christianity narrowly defines what constitutes the “*out-of*” and the “*into*” of conversion, it still relates to the basic meaning of the Latin term *converte*, which is to turn or to change. Regardless of cultural context, conversion conveys the idea of transition (Luzbetak 1993, 17). This is stated clearly by Roman Catholic missiologist Louis J. Luzbetak:

Conversion means a “turning” away from old ways to new ways, a basic reorientation in premises and goals, a whole-hearted acceptance of a new set of values affecting the “convert” as well as his social group, day in and day out, twenty-four hours of the day and in practically every sphere of activity—economic, social, and religious. The change affected must become *living* parts of the cultural “organism” (Luzbetak 1970, 6).

In comparing conversion to salvation, it is important to note that salvation refers to the act or process of deliverance from a dissatisfactory state to a more satisfying one. In Christian vocabulary, salvation is widely

used to express God's provision for the human situation of sin and alienation. "According to Louw and Nida the verb *to save* (*sozo*) has three meanings in the New Testament: (1) 'To rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well being'; (2) 'to cause someone to become well again after having been sick'; (3) 'to cause someone to experience divine salvation—to save'" (Green, McKnight and Marshall 1992, 720). The noun salvation (*soteria*) may refer to either the process of saving or to the result. According to Louw and Nida the noun *soterion* signifies "the means by which people experience divine salvation" (ibid, 721). An alternative term is "deliverance." Conversion may then be seen as equivalent to the concept of salvation in that the "*out-of-into*" experience is seen as deliverance from a negative status to a positive one. The connotation is both immediate and progressive in that salvation has a beginning as well as future orientation.

#### 4.1.2 Hindu understanding of salvation

Any group's doctrine of salvation must be understood in light of the group's socio-historical context; and the more unfamiliar the context, the more need of its thorough examination. It follows then that an adequate presentation of salvation as held by orthodox Hindus will require study of the doctrine's development over many years in keeping with the evolution of the Hindu scriptures.

Hinduism is a religion without a founder, without a central authority, and without a fixed creed. It is filled with contradictions. Some adherents worship a personified Power of Nature while others worship idols of local areas. It has no uniform moral standard. It changes, yet continues. Hence it is called "*Sanathan Dharma*" or Eternal Religion (Lemuel 1994, 22),<sup>71</sup>

Making a summary statement concerning the concept of salvation in Hinduism is more difficult than one might imagine.

Because Hinduism is so interwoven with the Indian way of life, Hinduism can be said to be both more and less than a religion, depending on one's definition and viewpoint. Hinduism may be seen as a sociological grouping of persons quite free of any set of creeds regarding the nature and work of God. The unity of Hinduism is not

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<sup>71</sup> Rev. R. S. Lemuel is the Executive Director of the Mennonite Brethren Board of Evangelism and Church Ministries in South India.

built on any insistence on the existence or nonexistence of God. In this sense, the faith of the Hindus is not a religion. However, Hinduism may also be said to be more than a religion. This is true because most Hindus do hold in common certain practices, ideals, duties, beliefs and scriptures. This gives to Hinduism a basic identity even without a common view of God (Starkes1978, 33).

John Baker observes, “It is the essence of Hinduism that there are many different ways of looking at a single object, none of which will give the view of the whole,

but each of which is entirely valid in its own right” (Baker u.p., 2). In fact, salvation in Hindu context must be examined from the perspective of various stages of development in Hinduism. The concept of salvation in Hinduism has actually changed and varied over different periods of time and may be categorized as: 1) The early period of Hinduism; 2) popular Hinduism; and, 3) modern Hinduism. In addition, some describe Hinduism by categories: Brahmanism or Philosophical Hinduism (dominated by the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads); Religious Hinduism (influenced by Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita); Popular Hinduism (dominated by traditions such as ancestral worship, animal worship, magic, etc.); Mystical Hinduism (led by *gurus* such as Sai Baba, Rajneesh, Mahesh Yogi, and Swami Prabhupada); and Secular Hinduism (nominal in spiritual adherence but normally radical in political orientation and activity; e.g. BJP party in India).

#### *4.1.2.1 Salvation in the early periods of Hinduism (3500 B.C.-250 A.D.)*

The way of salvation in Hinduism is unique in each of the early periods of Hinduism, which have been classified into 1) The Pre-Vedic Period, 3500 B.C.-2000 B.C.; 2) The Vedic-Period, 2000-1000 B.C.; 3) The Brahmanic Period 600-250 B.C.; and 4) the Devotional Period 250 B.C.-250 A.D. The religion of the Pre-Vedic period was polytheistic with worship of trees, animals, goddesses, and Shiva; however, the way of salvation was not clearly articulated. Actual Hinduism began with the Vedic Period. The sacred scriptures of these periods are called Vedas, of which there are four classifications. Each *Veda* consists of three parts designated as *Mantras* or Hymnals, *Brahmans* or Rituals, and *Upanishads* or Commentaries. The

earliest Hymns were composed approximately fifteen hundred years before Christ over a period of three or four centuries. *The Hymns* are addressed to deified powers of nature, such as the Sun, the Rain, and the Wind. A double trend exists in the Hymns—a trend towards monotheism, and a trend towards pantheism. The important Veda is the Rig-Veda. The religion in the Vedic Period was mostly nature worship and Hindus prayed to the personalized powers of nature, such as the sun, moon, sky, wind, rain, dawn, earth, air, and fire. The idea of sin is present in Vedic religion as prayers were offered for the forgiveness of sins. To obtain salvation according to the Vedic teaching one had to offer prayers, offerings, and repeat magical formulas to avert the wrath of the offended gods. The chief method of salvation in the Rig Vedic was prayer (Geden 1913, 195-241).

During the Brahmanic Period the priests became more important than the gods. The chief literature of this period is Brahmanas. *The Rituals* were developed by a class of priests who became the custodians of the Hymns, transmitting them orally from generation to generation along with an evolving set of ceremonies to be performed, sacrifices to be offered, and Hymns to be recited at sacrifices. A large amount of material developed known as the Brahman Rituals that in time were considered divinely inspired. As a result, salvation began to be seen as largely mediated through works—partly ethical, but chiefly sacrificial; that is, merit obtained by offering sacrifices in proportion to their nature and costliness. Salvation was obtained mainly through sacrifices performed by the Brahman Priests. Among the sacrifices the chief and elaborate sacrifice was the Asva-Medha (horse sacrifice). The sacrifice required a whole year for its completion and involved the slaying of 609 animals in a certain prescribed succession (ibid, 242-254).

*The Commentaries* or *Upanishads* began with the initiation of a theological school whose purpose was to study the scriptures and expose their spiritual meaning. The school's interpretation was widely received and eventually accorded inspired status. The *Upanishads* are said to have numbered one hundred fifty but only a dozen or so of these are known.<sup>72</sup> These constitute the most widely read section of the *Vedas* and are studied primarily by educated Hindus.

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<sup>72</sup> The Upanishads are designated as follows: Isha Upanishad, Kena Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, Katha Upanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad, Aitareya Upanishad, Prashna Upanishad, Madukya Upanishad, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chhandogya Upanishad, Shweteshwatara Upanishad, Kaivalya Upanishad (Aurobindo 1996, I).

The Upanishads are at once profound religious scriptures, -- for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences, -- documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression. It is the expression of a mind in which a philosophy and religion and poetry are made one, because this religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks of luminous knowledge and an ecstasy of moved and fulfilled experience, this philosophy is not an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of the logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived, held by the inmost mind and soul in the joy of utterance of an assured discovery and possession, and this poetry is the work of the aesthetic mind lifted up beyond its ordinary field to express the wonder and beauty of the rarest spiritual self-vision and the profoundest illumined truth of self and God and universe (Aurobindo 1996, 1).

The central idea of the Upanishad is worked out in four successive movements of thought.

The first canon of Hindu scriptures was thus complete five or six centuries before Christ.

In the Upanishadic period the writers of the Upanishads left the deities of the Vedas and the sacrificial rituals of the Brahmanas in order to discover the inner force, the origin of the phenomena of nature and the self. The four-fold caste system was believed to have been created by Brahma (God). Maya became the doctrine of the “not real.” The Upanishads emphasized the knowledge as the supreme way of salvation. But the knowledge of what? The knowledge of Ultimate Reality. For them Brahma is Ultimate Reality. Brahma is not the person but is the Cosmic Power, that is, “Sarvam Brahma” (everything is Brahma). Those who understand this truth will experience salvation.

Regarding Salvation or Liberation a totally new dimension took shape during this period. The Upanishads discarded the Vedic gods as

necessary for man's salvation. They also discarded the efficacy of the sacrifice for one's salvation.

During this period Hinduism became legalistic. The Code of Manu taught the sacredness and saving efficacy of the Vedas, the performance of Hindu sacrifices, the sanctioning of war, Upanashaidic knowledge of Brahma-Atman, and the final release from transmigration. Temples and temple priests became important. Idols are first mentioned clearly in this {24} document. The four-fold caste system was greatly elaborated in this period. The Brahman by birth were considered the incarnation of deity and the Sudra was placed in low status. Salvation, according to this period, was obtained by showing obedience to the law of Manu; particularly to the law of caste (Lemuel 1994, 22-23).

Salvation in the Upanishads is seen as something more than the experience or reward of the individual. In the third movement of the Isha Upanishad, verses 9-11 relate to the concept of salvation:

Immortality beyond the universe is not the object of manifestation in the universe, for that the Self possessed. Man exists in order that through him the Self may enjoy Immortality in the birth as well as in the non-becoming. Nor is individual salvation the end; for that would only be the sublime of the ego, not its self-realisation through the Lord in all. Having realized his own immortality, the individual has yet to fulfill God's work in the universe. He has to help the life, the mind and the body in all beings to express progressively Immortality and not mortality (Aurobindo 1996, 68-69).

Again, in the Kena Upanishad, salvation is considered more of a universal rather than individual experience.

Well then may we ask, we the modern humanity more and more conscious of the inner warning of that which created us, be it Nature or God, that there is a work for the race, a divine purpose in its creation which exceeds the salvation of the individual soul, because the universal is as real or even more real than the individual, we who feel more and more, in the language of the Koran, that the Lord did not create heaven and earth in a jest, that Brahman did not begin dreaming this world-dream in a moment of aberration and delirium, -- well may we ask whether this gospel of individual salvation is all the message even of this purer, earlier, more catholic Vedanta. If so, then

Vedanta at its best is a gospel for the saint, the ascetic, the monk, the solitary, but it has not a message which the widening consciousness of the world can joyfully accept as the word for which it was waiting (ibid, 187).

During the period of Devotional Hinduism the *Bhagavad Gita* became the most highly esteemed scripture of Hinduism. The *Bhagavad Gita* or “The Song of the Adorable” is written in the form of dialogues between Krishna the Charioteer of *Arjuna* and the leader of the *Pandavas*. Another notable point is that the *Bhagavad Gita* reaffirms the caste system. In fact, the primary message of the *Bhagavad Gita* is “Do your caste duty, and trust your God for the rest of your salvation” (Prabhupada 1986, 4). In fact, the *Gita* ascribes the caste system as the creation of *The Blessed Lord*

I founded the four-caste system with the *gunas* appropriate to each; although I did this, know that I am the eternal non-doer (Mitchell 2000, 74).<sup>73</sup>

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers universal salvation to all sinners even to women and low-caste Sudras. Salvation according to the *Bhagavad Gita* is obtained mainly through devotion to a personal deity.

#### 4.1.2.2 Salvation according to popular Hinduism (250 A.D.-1700 A.D.)

The concept of salvation during the period of popular Hinduism derived from the teachings of literature, namely, the Epics, *Purans*, philosophical Schools and the religious sects of Hinduism. The Epics and *Purans* consist of two great stories: “The *Mahabharata*” and “The *Ramayana*.” Until this period the teaching of the salvation through the way of knowledge was relevant to the intellectuals, Brahmins and to the sages. In this period a new concept was developed to make the way of salvation understandable to common people. The new way of salvation in this period was the way of devotion to any god, idol, river or mountain. To obtain the salvation the people worshipped idols, visited sacred places and observed several ceremonies. The idols were in various forms of human and animal representations, including male and female sex organs (e.g. *ling*<sup>74</sup>). Various philosophical schools originated at this time as the result of attacks made by the Jains and the Buddhists against the traditions and doctrines of the Vedas

<sup>73</sup> This statement is found in chapter four, “The Yoga of Wisdom,” section 4.12-16.

<sup>74</sup> *Ling* is Hindi for the penis or phallus. It also denotes the phallus deity representing lord Shiva. Phallus worship is known as *ling-puja* (Wagenaar 1993, 344).



and Upanishads. All six of these schools have some common factors to contribute to the way of salvation. The *Nyaya* School tells the meaning of the knowledge (gnosis) that is the way of salvation. The *Vaisheshika* School mainly deals with the atomic arrangement of things. The *Samkhya* School systematically explains creation. The *Yoga* School provides the means of attaining ultimate perfection by controlling physical and psychical elements of human nature. The *Mimamsa* School teaches that salvation will be obtained

through dharma of the ritualistic observances prescribed in the Vedas. The *Vedanta* School tells of the philosophy of the Upanishads. *Saivism* is a very important sect in which Siva (also spelled Shiva) is worshipped. According to the beliefs of this sect, remission of sins through repentance is not mandatory. Instead, simply performing certain religious ceremonies, such as bathing in sacred rivers and the uttering of a few mantras or prayers, enables one to acquire salvation. The Power of Siva is defined by using various names such as Kali, Durga, and Parvathi. The way of salvation according to this sect is by following the way of *Sadhanas*, that is, through different efforts to become good. The god of *Vaishnavism* is Vishnu. According to this sect the *bhakti* or loving devotion to Vishna is the best means of liberation. Devotees of another sect, Ramaism, seek salvation through loving devotion to Rama, an incarnation (avatar) of Vishnu. The earliest *bhakti* poets were the followers of Siva, the *Nayanars* (Siva Devotees), who sang ecstatically of his dances. Tirumular was a mystic and reformer in the so-called *Siddhanta* (Perfected Man) school of *Saivism*, which rejected caste and asceticism, and believed that the body is the true temple of Siva. There were 12 early Nayanar saints. Similar poets, in the tradition of devotion to the god Vishnu, also belonged to this period of popular Hinduism. Called *Alvars* (Immersed Ones), they had as their first representatives Poykai, Putan, and Peyar, who composed "centuries" (groups of 100) of linked verses (*antati*), in which the final line of a verse is the beginning line of the next and the final line of the last verse is the beginning of the first, so that a "garland" is formed (Geden 1913, 311-332).

#### 4.1.2.3 Salvation According To Modern Hinduism (1700 A.D.-Present)

Several significant Hindu leaders have attempted to reform Hinduism. Many of these reformers were influenced by Christianity though their reformation was based on their original religious materials. Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was born in a Bengali family and was well versed in Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English and Hebrew languages. He refused to

accept idol worship and wrote a book on Jesus: *The Principles of Jesus: the Guide to Happiness*. However, Roy accepted some truths from all other religions. For example, in order to gain salvation one has to worship only in a spiritual way instead of resorting to Hindu asceticism, temples and fixed forms of worship. Another reformer by the name of Keshab-Chandra Sen (1838-1884) is considered by some to be the greatest reformer of Hinduism. Sen “started his own *Samaj* (Society) called the Church of New Dispensation. He tried to organize the conflicting creeds of all religions. The church harmonized reason, faith, yoga and bhakti, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms to attain spiritual growth” (Lemuel 1994, 25). Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-1886) was born to a pious Brahman family. With no formal education, Paramahansa became a devotee of Kali and his reform movement became the most influential of modern movements in Hinduism. His major emphasis was that all religions are equally good and according to his teaching, salvation can be obtained through any religion. His primary method of meditation was *Samadhi* (concentration on God). Still another major reformer was Swamy Vivekananda (1862-1902). Vivekananda was born to a middle class *Kshatriya* (warrior caste) family and eventually became the disciple of Ramakrishna. His main teaching was conversion was unnecessary since nobody is a sinner. He said that to call a man a sinner is itself a sin. Vivekananda based his gospel on the doctrine of the identity of the individual soul with Brahma, thereby espousing the divinity of man (ibid, 25-26). Much of “New Age” teaching is based upon this reformed Hindu philosophy (Chandler 1988, 43-50).

#### 4.1.2.4 Summary of Hindu doctrines related to salvation

Three doctrines from these scriptures are vital to Hinduism and must be recognized for an understanding of the Hindu doctrine of salvation. The first of these is spiritual Monism, which conceives of existence as the manifold expression of a single substance.<sup>75</sup> The second important doctrine is known as transmigration (*punarjanma*). As Hindus considered the efficacy of animal sacrifice, they determined that the sacrificial system fell short of what conscience demands. The *Upanishads* teach that there can be no transfer of guilt as the priests taught, but that everyone must receive the results of his deeds, whether good or evil. Herein lies the meaning of *karma bandan*—“coils of activities both good and bad that bind a person to

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<sup>75</sup> The doctrine of Monism is expressed in the classical Hindu phrase: “One without a Second.”

existence and mandate that he be reborn again and again” (David 1998, 182). Man is disciplined until deed finds fruition in eternal union with the Infinite Spirit. “Such discipline may involve a countless number of existences but, be the number what it may, even unto the eighty-four *lacs*, that alone can be a last birth which, overcoming the pull of separate existence, merges the finite in the Infinite. Such is the doctrine of Transmigration (*samskara*), held by all alike, whether monists or dualists, orthodox or heterodox, theists, pantheists, or atheists” (Stillwell 1914, 355). The third doctrine is known as *Gnosis*, or salvation through knowledge. This salvation is for those who can qualify and is defined as union with the Infinite, a state of supreme and perfect holiness. It is the end of all forms of discipline—social, moral, or spiritual.

In summary, the first two ways of salvation are that of “work,” as found in the *Mantras* and *Brahmans*; and that of *Gnosis*, as seen in the *Upanishads*. A third way of salvation is detailed in other scriptures known as the *Epics* and the *Puranas* and is called the way of “Faith.” According to this doctrine, the one divine essence, named *Brahm*, manifested its invisible being in three co-equal beings named respectively, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, their original duties being creation, preservation, and destruction. The emanation was continued through a hierarchy of lesser beings, gods, goddesses, and demons; while on earth, the divine essence was embodied in kings, heroes, and great teachers who appeared as common people or material objects, stones, trees, and rivers. This describes the monistic principle of the *Upanishads* in that divinity pervades everything from the highest god to the lowest form of existence on the earth, and even in the hells under the earth. In addition, the co-equal divine beings had the power of expansion; most notably Vishnu who was incarnated nine times, of which two incarnations were especially divine—Rama who contained one-half of the divine essence, and Krishna who contained the full essence. The three co-equal beings are not subject to the law of transmigration but remain through all the changes that come to other beings until the age runs out with its absorption of all things into Brahm, from which they originally came. The “Way of Faith” means that the true worshipped of any one of the trinity is admitted to the heaven of the god worshipped, thereby saving the disciple from further birth. The god thus worshipped is to the disciple the Supreme One. Of the three co-equal beings, Vishnu obtains the chief devotion, being worshipped primarily in his incarnations of Rama and Krishna. Rama’s history is given in the *Ramayana*, a history familiar to every Hindu household. Two histories describe Krishna: one in the *Mahabhartas*; and the other in the *Puranas*. Stated succinctly, Hinduism teaches that the Infinite

Spirit is One, and that man is consubstantial with the Infinite Spirit (Starkes 1978, 53-60). Common to both Faith and Gnosis is that the divine pervades everything.

Salvation in Hinduism may best be termed “liberation”: Hindus use the Sanskrit term *moksa* or *mukti* for salvation. It means, “deliverance”, or “liberation”. The root word in Sanskrit for *moksa* or *mukti* is *muc*. It means “release” or “deliverance” from all kinds of pains and punishments. For instance, in Brahmanical or Philosophical Hinduism, *mukti* or *moksa* means, deliverance or liberation from bondage to the *samsara* (binding life cycle or reincarnation or transmigration of soul). This is the cherished ideal and goal of all Hindu religious life. The ideas of bondage and liberation (*mukti*) occupy an important place in Hindu philosophy and religion. Their main aim is the attainment of *mukti* or liberation from the *bandha* or bondage for the individual soul (*jiva*). Hinduism emphasizes man’s responsibility for the bondage of his soul and its release from it (Gnanakan 1992, 120).

Liberation as the goal of life is described by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada:

The Personality of Godhead, who is fully cognizant of everything in His creation, informs us that it is in our best interest that we desire to get out of this miserable existence. We must detach ourselves from everything material. To make the best use of a bad bargain, our material existence must be one-hundred-percent spiritualized. Iron is not fire, but it can be turned into fire by constant association with fire. Similarly, detachment from material activities can be effected by spiritual activities, not by material inertia. Material inertia is the negative side of material action, but spiritual activity is not only the negation of material action but the activation of our real life. We must be anxious to search out eternal life, or spiritual existence in Brahman, the Absolute. The eternal kingdom of Brahman is described in the *Bhagavad-gita* as that eternal country from which no one returns. That is the kingdom of God (Prabhupada 1980, 6-7).

The two stages of liberation are *Pravrtti* and *Nivrtti*. *Pravrtti* is simply enjoyment. “It is the worldly activity or the movement of the soul towards desired objects or its tendency towards objects of pleasure. It is an outgoing activity and is considered to be essential as a preliminary stage to attain liberation. The individual soul is like a spark from the divine fire and

it has an innate attraction for it. Similarly, the individual soul moves round the center of its being throughout its earthly journey, till at last it finds itself in God” (Gnanakan 1992, 132). By way of contrast, *Nivrtti* is renunciation, meaning detachment from the world but not renunciation of the world itself. In other words, this renunciation may be of the spirit apart from any necessary correlative activity. One is seen as the continuation of the other, meaning that the movement toward the world is followed by movement towards God, and the worldly life of pleasure leads the soul to seek the spiritual life of renunciation.

Understanding the Hindu concept of *karma* is the key that explains the goal of liberation. Its Sanskrit root is *kri*, which means “a deed” or “an action.” The basic meanings associated with *karma* are: (1) “what is done”; (2) “to offer sacrifice” (ceremonial deed); (3) “Law of Causality” or the law of cause and effect, meaning that any action in the present results from actions in the past, and these actions will affect the future as well; (4) “human conduct” in that there is a relationship between what a person is and does, how he does, what he has done previously and what he will become in the future as a result of it (“present condition is the accumulated result of his past actions, and his future is determined by unexpended consequences of his actions in his previous lives”) (ibid, 129).

*Karma* is the most grossly misunderstood word in all of Scriptural texts. The literal meaning of the word as explained to the masses by Pundits is its relation to the physical concept of a being. You perform *karma* as a physical manifested being and this shall suffice your journey to the *Swarga* (Heaven) ... Provided you earn *Punya Karma*! What one fails to explain is that physical work alone does not constitute the in-depth meaning of *karma* ... The physical work being performed by one is only the tip of the iceberg. Committing a sin even in thoughts is committing a *papa karma*! For achieving any aim of life one has to accumulate *punya* (a hidden factor). It is only the *punya* or *papa karma* performed by one which decides what body the *atman* (soul) within shall manifest in next life! You work (perform your *karma*) like an animal ... you are bound to be born one in next life. You are a true soldier of God, respect all and continue performing your *dharma* without violating the right of others ... You may be born an ascetic who while living in a family lives leads a pious life. Further more depending on your karma, if you are granted a boon by the Almighty

God ... you may realize-self, become one with God, the Creator within that life! (Kumar 1993, 1)

Clearly, the chief aim in Hinduism is to gain release from the cycle of reincarnation caused by *karma*. Hinduism recognizes that in the course of many lifetimes people may legitimately pursue one or more specific life goals. The first of these is called *kama*--the goal of pleasure or enjoyment, particularly through love and sexual desire. The second legitimate aim in life is for wealth and success. This is called *artha*. The third goal in life is moral duty or *dharma*, in which one renounces personal pleasure and power in order to seek the common good. However, the final aim in life is *moksha* - liberation from the cycle of lives in this material world, and entrance into Nirvana.

Though the common view of *moksha* is liberation from earthly existence, there are differences of opinion within Hinduism regarding the nature of liberation and the time it is actually attained. Some of the significant questions related to *moksha* are: Is *moksha* only the extinction of existence? Is it a state of pure existence for the individual self (*jiva*)? Is salvation the soul's (*atman*) union with God (*paramatman*)? Is it self-realization of a person's identity with God? Is salvation attainable in this life or only after death? If salvation is attainable in this life, does the liberated self (*jivanmukta*) live in this world actively or inactive? Hindu philosophers have attempted to answer these questions in the following ways:

***Ucchedavadi*** is the Nihilist position that says liberation means the termination of a person's existence in this world. Since the desire to live is the cause of all evil or suffering in the world, it is necessary to denounce the will to live and live an ascetic lifestyle.

***Nyaya-Vaisesika*** means the final cessation of an individual's suffering without the possibility of returning to earthly existence. Upon *moksha*, the individual soul exists as pure unconscious substance and is not subject to pain, pleasure, suffering or happiness. This condition is described as freedom from fear (*abhayam*), freedom from change (*ajaram*) and freedom from death (*amrtyupadam*). This is seen as a gradual process of self-discipline whereby the individual gains a right knowledge of reality and removes the wrong knowledge of reality. "In this way, his past *karmas* are exhausted and he does not have to undergo any more birth (*janma*) in this world." This liberation is only attained after death.

***Sankhya-Yoga*** sees liberation as the absolute cessation of all Kinds of pain and suffering without the possibility of return. This view differs from *Nyaya-Vaisesika* in that the individual self is seen as pure consciousness distinct from the body, mind, and ego. Salvation is viewed as the self experiencing liberation from all afflictions of mind, suffering of body, and desires of ego. It is possible to achieve this liberation while living in the body on the earth.

***Mimamsa***, also known as *Karma-mimamsa* (examination of the effect of actions). The goal of *mimamsa* is heaven (*svarga*), a state of pure bliss that may be attained in the afterlife by performing the Vedic rites in this life. However, these actions must be apart from the desire for enjoyment, making them the disinterested performance of obligatory duties.

***Vedanta*** literally means “the end of the Vedas.” *Vedanta* teaches that liberation is the manifestation of eternal bliss and is attainable in this life. The individual self is identical with *Brahman* and it is *maya* or ignorance that veils this truth from the individual, making him or her see himself as separate from God. This results in the soul’s bondage. By studying the *Vedanta* the individual self realizes the truth that it is one with Brahman. The individual may continue living on earth but does so without any desire for the world’s object. This is called *jivan-mukti* (the liberation of one while still alive). After death, the self enters into a state of liberation from all bodies (*videhamukti*).

***Visistadvaita Vedanta*** views man’s liberation as the loving recognition of God as Lord of all and the blessed communion with the divine being. “Man who is finite cannot be completely identical with God who is infinite in every aspect.” Liberation is not attained by study or knowledge but only through God’s grace. God’s grace is given to those who are sincerely devoted to God, displayed through devout meditation. The liberated soul becomes similar to God (*brahmaprakara*) and is liberated from the body forever. This takes place only after death (Gnanakan 1992, 125-27).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The background for much of this information comes from the chapter on “Salvation in Hindu Contexts” by Emmanuel E. James in: K. Gnanakan, *Salvation: Some Asian Perspectives*, Bangalore, India: Asia Theological Association, 1992, pp. 119-44.

Hindus recognize four possible paths, or *margas*, to *moksha*, or salvation. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga* (*karma-marga*). This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one's familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued. The Code of Manu lists many of these rules. Most important among them are certain rituals conducted at various stages of life. *Karma marga* leads to liberation through self-purification and self-realization. The termination of one's feeling of pride and egoism (*ahankara*) is essential for liberation. The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge or *jnana yoga* (*jnana-marga*). The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance or *avidya*. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves and not one with the ultimate divine reality called Brahman. It is this ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions that result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga. *Jnana marga* is considered the most difficult path among the other recognized paths of liberation and is seen as only for those who are mature in their intellect and rationalistic in temperament. Therefore, it is said that *jnana-marga* is the highest of all paths and that all *karmas* or actions culminate in knowledge (*jnana*). Knowledge necessary to attain liberation is the philosophic knowledge about God, Self, and the world, requiring a pure heart and calm mind (Radhakrishnan 1929, 15-43).

A third way of salvation is the way of devotion or *bhakti yoga*. The word *bhakti* comes from the Sanskrit root *bhaj*, meaning "to love, worship, adore." This is the way most favored by the common people of India; it satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It is self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, *puja*, at the temple, in the home, through participation in the many festivals in honor of such gods, and through pilgrimages to one of the numerous holy sites in India. In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God. A *bhakta* or devotee can find God revealed in objects of nature like the sun, moon, fire, and worship him as such. Since God is manifested in many forms, the *bhakta* may worship God



in the form of gods and goddesses at certain stages of his or her religious life. Hindus claim that images or symbols are concrete representations of God and therefore image worship is not idolatry but in actuality the worship of God as represented by means of symbols or images. Hindus also worship divine personalities who are regarded as incarnations (*avatara*) of God on earth. Examples of *avatara* are: Krishna, Rama, or Buddha (Nikhilananda 1958, 57-69).

A fourth and final path to salvation is called *raja yoga*, "the royal road." The word *yoga* derives from the root *yuj* in Sanskrit, meaning "to join, to yoke or to unite." Therefore, *yoga* is the uniting of a person's mental or spiritual faculties in a concentrated effort towards a spiritual goal. *Raja yoga* makes use of meditative yoga techniques and is usually viewed as the highest way. In an effort to free one's self from bondage and ignorance, the individual must go through the process of self-training in the eight stages or limbs (*angas*) of *Yoga*. They are as follows:

- *Yama* (restraint)
- *Niyama* (self-culture)
- *Asana* (posture)
- *Pranayama* (breath control)
- *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses)
- *Dharana* (attention)
- *Dhyana* (meditation)
- *Samadhi* (concentration)

These are known as aids to *yogana*, which means the complete cessation of all mental functions (*chittavrtti-nirodha*) and makes possible the realization of the Self as pure consciousness. In the final stage, the entire world of objects ceases to affect the Self. The majority of people cannot become wandering monks, so other ways are considered valid.

Common to all systems of Hinduism are the concepts of bondage (*samsara*) and liberation (*moksha*). "All of them accept *mukti* or *moksha* as the ultimate end or goal of human life" (Gnanakan 1992, 128). Most Hindus consider that they have many incarnations ahead of them before they can experience final salvation, although some sects believe that a gracious divinity will carry them along the way more quickly.

#### 4.1.2.5 The concept of sin in Hindu salvation

Hinduism has four main denominations—*Saivism*, *Shaktism*, *Vaishnavism* and *Smartism*. *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* accept that all the people are born with a sinful nature. *Vaishnavism* explains that God was born so that He could deliver man from sinful nature and give new life:

"Poinninra gnanamum pollaa olukkum  
alukkudambhum inninra neermai ini yaam  
vuraamai vuyir alippaan ienninra yoniumaai  
piranthaai imaiyore thalaivaa"  
(God was born from a noble woman in order to  
give us a new life so that deceptive knowledge,  
immorality and unclean body would not possess  
us)

(*Numalvar Thiruviruthum 1 - 3580*)

*Advaitists* say that the concept of sin is *maya* or illusion. *Saiva Siddhanta* explains that God alone can liberate man since man himself is sinful by nature. It is explained by the following illustration. If a man wants to make copper free from rust, gold, which is never affected by rust, should be melded together with it and mixed. After that process it will not be affected by rust. In the same way, God alone who is holy can liberate human beings that have a sinful nature by birth. In order to redeem man from sin and show him the path, God became a man with five senses. This is explained in *Vaishnavism* as follows:

'*Pavam aruppaar*' (God who takes away our sin)

(*Sadagopar Anthaathi – 8*) *Sivagnanapotham*, the theological foundation for *Saivism* says the following about sin:

"*Avan aval athu yenum avai moovinaimayin  
thotria thithiye odungi malaththulathaam  
antham aathi yenmanaar pulavar*"  
(In the beginning God created man (*avan*-first man), woman (*aval*-first woman) and the world (*athu*) in three different actions and they were holy. But, later on they fell into the sin or *malam*,

which ended the life of holiness and was the beginning of sin say the scholars.)

(*Sivagnanapotham - 1*)

How did creation that was holy, fall into sin? *Saiva Siddhanta* explains it as follows,

*"Muththi mutharkodikkae mogak kodi padarnthu  
aththi paluththathu yenru vunthee para  
appalham vunnaathae vunthee para"*  
(Among the creatures which were holy, on the first  
creeper (first man), the creeper of sin crept over it  
and bore the fruit of evil. Speak this forth. Do not  
partake of that fruit. Speak this forth.)

(*Thiruvuntiyar 41*) (Harris 2004, 64-66)

Advaitists claim that the concept of sin is *maya*, or illusion, but Saivism and Vaishnavism accept that all persons are born with a sinful nature. The sinful nature that passes continuously through progressive generations is known as *sahasa mala* in Saivism, and *janmabhandh* in Vaishnavism. Harris holds that the doctrines of God coming into the world, becoming our sacrifice, salvation by faith in Him, and man's response of total surrender to God as a living sacrifice all influenced the writer of the Bhagavad Gita (ibid, 63). "In order to redeem man for sin and show him the path, God became a man with five senses" (ibid, 67).

This is explained in Vaishnavism as follows:

*'Pavam aruppaar'* (God who takes away our sin) (*Sadagopar Anthaathi – 8*)

*"Avan kandaai nannenjae aararulum kedumavan kandaai aimpulanaai  
ninraan avan kandaai..."* (You with a pure heart, know him who is with five  
senses, and who is having grace, and who is the destroyer of sin) (*Nalaryira  
Divya Prabhandam Eyarpa erandam Thiruvanthaathi-(24)-3307*)

It is explained in Saivism as follows:

*"Aimpula vaedarin ayanthanai valarnthenammuthal guruvumoi  
dhavaththinil vunarththa vittuanniyam inmaiyin aran kalhal selumae"* (God  
who came into this world as a Guru on seeing the souls who are living in  
worldly pleasure by enjoying the pleasures of the five senses, made them to

feel through his penance of suffering of death that they have forgotten their creator and are living in sin. Once the soul is enlightened through his suffering, it repents of its sins, and the separation with God is removed and it reaches the feet of God)

(*Sivagnanapotham* - 8)

This is explained in Saiva Siddhanta by the following illustration. A son of a king was lost and he was living as a hunter with the hunters, and did not know that he was the son of a king. One day, when the king learned that his son was living as a hunter, he wanted to see him immediately. However, It occurred to him that if he were to go as a king his son might be afraid of him and run away. So, he disguised himself as a hunter and went to meet him and conversed with his son. He explained to the son that he was not a hunter but instead a son of a king, and he took the son back to his palace. Similarly, God took the form of a man in order to redeem mankind who are enslaved by the pleasures of this world and have forgotten their God. He made us to realize who we are through the “penance” of his suffering of death. Thiruvalluvar says that real penance is sacrificing ones own life for others.

Therefore God is described in Saivism as:

‘*Meydhavan kaan*’ (Look at the one who has done true penance)

(*Thirunavukkarasar* 265-8)

‘*Perundhavaththu yem pingnagan kaan*” (Look at our Lord of great penance)

(*Appar – Pa. A.* 278 – 5)

The same concept is explained in Vaishnavism as follows:

‘*Thaanae dhava vuruvum*’ (He is the embodiment of penance) (*Nalaryira Divya Prabhandam- Iyarpa mundram Thiruvanthaathi-38-4321*)  
‘*Sinthanaiyai dhavaneriyai thirumaalai*’(He is our thought who is a path through his penance of sacrifice and is Thirumal)

(*Periya Thirumolhi* 6-3-7 (1404))

‘*Pinakkara aruvagai samayamum neriyulli vuraiththakanakkaru nalaththan; anthamil aathiam pagavanvanakkudai dhavaneri valininru*’(The consistent theme revealed is that God is the one who is the source of all blessings, is

the one who has neither beginning nor end, and is the one who showed the true path through his great penance of suffering)

(*Numalvar Thiruvaimolhi 1-3-5 (2108)*)

The God who accepted the penance of the suffering of death and offered himself as a sacrifice is sung about in the following Saivite songs:

‘*Aviyumaagi*’

(One who became the sacrifice)

(*Appar 307-8*)

*'Aviyaai aviyumaagi arukkamaai perukkamaagipaaviyar paavam theerkum paramanoi Brahmanaagi'*(The supreme God became Brahma and he is the sacrifice and sacrificed himself in order to redeem sinners)

(*Thirunavukkarasar Devaram – pa. a. 320*)

The songs mentioned above explain that God became man and sacrificed himself in order to redeem the sinners.

*"Pori vaayil ainhaviththaan poitheer olhukkaneri ninraar needu vaalhvaar"*(Those who follow the one, who sacrificed his five senses on an instrument and showed us the way and who is the life and truth, will have eternal life)

(*Thirukkural – 6*)

Once the soul is cleansed from its sin through the sacrifice of God, it is freed from sin and it becomes a temple of God. This is sung as follows,

*"Semmalar nonthaal seral ottaa ammalam kaliee anbarodu mariyee maalara neyam malinthavar vaedamumaalayam tha anum aran yena tholumae"* (Once God cleanses a soul which is separated by sin from the feet of God which looks like a red flower because of its sacrifice (*nonbu*), it becomes one with God and it is freed from confusion and it overflows with love of God and it reaches the feet of God and become a temple of God.)

(*Sivagnanapotham - 12*)

Vaishnavism denotes this as ‘*Shethram*’ or ‘*Shethrangnan*’ (ibid, 67-70).

“It is Jesus Christ alone who is mentioned in the history of the world religions as the only one who became an avatar and sacrificed himself. Thus,

God became a man and sacrificed himself on the cross (through the penance of suffering of death) in order to redeem sinners, and earned salvation for them. Hence our forefathers of the bhakthi movement, Alvars and Nayanmars, who had deep bhakthi towards God have sung beautifully about this loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the post-Christian era” (ibid, 71).

#### 4.1.3 Comparison and Evaluation

Hinduism emphasizes spiritual experience and its necessity for life, with a corresponding emphasis on the awareness of God. In this way, the emphasis of Hinduism is similar to that of the Christian faith. The goal of life has been given various names by different religions: salvation, perfection, liberation, eternal life, *Najat*, *Moksha*, *Mukti* or *Nirvana*. While difficult to understand the true essence of Hinduism, it is not impossible if this is kept in mind. “Hindu systems view reality in relation to God, man and liberation” (Gnanakan 1992, 140). These various systems vary according to different schools of thought and practice, but one thing remains constant in all schools of Hinduism: salvation is liberation from the cycle of births and rebirths. It is an individual effort that holds implications for the entire universe. It is important to note that liberation in Hinduism is from ignorance (*avidya*) and unreality (*maya*) rather than from moral evil and sin. Hinduism has no clear concept of sin, original sin, corruption of human nature, no atonement, and no salvation by faith. Radhakrishnan states, “Sin is not so much a denial of God as a denial of soul, not so much a violation of law as a betrayal of self.”<sup>77</sup>

Though there is the idea of a gracious God in Hinduism, it differs greatly from the Christian concept of grace because in Hinduism, God remains outside humanity’s problems, pain and sufferings. Sin does not move the heart of God. In stark contrast, the grace of Jesus Christ demanded he suffer and die for the sins of man and man’s redemption. Only through the *karma* of repentance may an individual receive forgiveness, and the forgiven *bhaktan* responds with a *karma* of love for Christ and other human beings. Salvation, or true liberation, begins in the heart of God and not in the will of man.<sup>78</sup>

##### 4.1.3.1 Forward Caste Social Structure in Light of the Hindu Caste System

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted by Emmanuel E. James in his essay, “Salvation in Hindu Contexts” (Gnanakan 1992, 141).

<sup>78</sup> “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” (Romans 9:16, *New International Version*)

## CASTE AND KARMA

The caste system has *karma* as its philosophical justification. “The Law of *Karma* is closely related to the doctrine of Re-incarnation (*Punarjanma*). According to this, *karma* works itself out through several births of various kinds (Gnanakan 1992, 130). *Karma* explains two things for the Hindu: First, it offers reasons for the inequalities of life. It explains why there are wealthy and poor persons, high and low, superior and inferior, men and women, pleasurable and painful experiences. The status, opportunities, condition and capacity of persons are determined by past actions in previous lives. Pain, punishment and suffering result from evil actions and pleasure, blessing and enjoyment result from meritorious actions. Orthodox Hinduism claim that the doctrine of *karma* along with transmigration (*punarjanma* or *samskara*) defend the caste system as the accepted social order in Hindu society.

The terms *varna* and *jati* are often used interchangeably when speaking of ‘caste,’ but this tends to obscure the difference between them. *Varna* literally means color and refers to the characteristic difference between the Aryans and non-Aryans, the former being fairer skinned and the latter the darker skinned. Many scholars believe this contrast formed the original basis of caste.<sup>79</sup> *Varna* represents the fourfold division of Hindu social order, whereas *jati* represents the smaller groups in society. A vast network of subcastes, or *jatis*, is closely linked to occupation, with relationships based on work and economic interdependence. In this way, the individual is prevented from scaling the hierarchy of castes, but the subcaste as a group may gain status as the nature of the work achieves greater relevance in changing times. “The word caste (Latin *castus*) meaning pure, was used by the Portuguese to denote the Indian social classification because they were of the opinion that this system was intended to preserve the purity of blood” (Sharma 1999, 4). Though many have used the terms caste and *varna* interchangeably, there are certain factors that differentiate the two. According to *varna*, there are only four castes, determined and upheld by the law of *karma*. The four castes are known as *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*. Orthodox Hindus see the earliest reference to the caste system in the *Purusa-sukta*, a section of the *Rig-veda*.

*Rig-veda* symbolically describes that *Brahman* created the caste and that each caste emerges from the different parts of his body. The *Brahmins* who are the priestly class came from Brahma’s mouth;

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<sup>79</sup> A. A. McDonnell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*. Delhi: Banarsidass, 1979, p. 128; S. Cromwell Crawford, *The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals*. Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1982, p. 15.

*Kshatriyas*, the warriors and ruling class came from Brahma's arms; the *Vaishyas*, who are the peasants and business people, came from Brahma's thighs and *Shudras*, the unskilled labourers and who do menial jobs came from Brahma's feet. There were also *untouchables* who did not belong to any definite class who were expelled from the Hindu society. Within each caste there is internal autonomy and freedom within a social hierarchy demanding strict conformity to laws and practices concerning marriage, diet duties, and group discipline in society (Gnanakan 1992, 131).

Some describe caste as more the product of practical evolution rather than religious designation. In his guide to customs and etiquette in India, Gitanjali Kolanad purports, "Caste evolved to serve the same purposes that the medieval workers' guilds had served in Britain, and that the workers' unions are supposed to serve today. They preserved the workers from unfair competition, and preserved the knowledge of each community" (Kolanad 1994, 38). He goes on to say that, "In an age when antiseptics and antibiotics did not exist, there were entirely practical reasons to have one group of people do the dangerous (for health reasons) work of carting away carcasses and making leather from the hides. One theory is that the caste that was 'untouchable' developed immunities over generations, and the other castes avoided them for purely health reasons" (Kolanad 1994, 38-39). Gandhi attempted to reverse the stigma of untouchability by renaming them *Harijans*, a name meaning "children of God", but now they refuse patronization as objects of sentimental piety. Instead, they prefer the self-designation of *Dalits*, meaning "oppressed."

The word 'caste' comes from the Portuguese word *casta*, signifying breed, race or kind. The first use of this word in the restricted sense of what we now understand by caste seems to date from 1563 when Garcia de Orta wrote that "no one changes from his father's trade and all those of the same caste (*casta*) of shoemakers are the same" (Hutton 1946, 42). To define a caste is harder than to give the derivation of the term. Risley defines it as "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community" (ibid, 42).

The Caste name is generally associated with a specific occupation and that a caste is almost invariably endogamous, but is further divided, as a rule, into a number of smaller circles each of which is endogamous, so that a



Brahman is not only restricted to marrying another Brahman, but to marrying a woman of the same subdivision of Brahmans. Ketkar defines caste as “a social group having two characteristics: (1) membership is confined to those who are born of members, and includes all persons so born; (2) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. Each one of these groups has a special name by which it is called, several of such small aggregates are grouped together under a common name, while these large groups are but subdivisions of groups still larger which have independent names. Thus we see that there are several stages of groups and that the word ‘caste’ is applied to groups at any stage. The words ‘caste’ and ‘sub caste’ are not absolute but comparative in signification. The larger group will be called a caste while the smaller group will be called a sub caste” (ibid, 43). A caste has been described as a social unit, and it is in accordance with its character as such that it is, generally speaking, the guardian of its own rules, that it disciplines its members, expels them from the community, or readmits them after penalties imposed and satisfaction exacted. From the point of view of the individual member of a caste, the system provides him from birth with a fixed social milieu from which neither wealth nor poverty, success nor disaster can remove him, unless of course he so violates the standards of behavior laid down by his caste that it spews him forth—temporarily or permanently. He is provided in this way with a permanent body of associations which controls almost all his behavior and contacts (Prabhu 1963, 36-57). Alagodi, speaking in regional terms, affirms the integrating importance of caste in Hindu society: “According to Gururaj Bhatt, the most important caste groups in South Kanara were the Billovas, the Mogers, the Bunts, the Brahmins and the Jains and these groups have played a significant role in the evolution of the social and cultural life of this Tulunadu”<sup>80</sup> (Alagodi 1998, 28).

The Indian Constitution of 1950 destroyed the quasi-legal basis the caste system enjoyed up to that point, and declared all citizens equal before the law, explicitly outlawing “prejudice and favoritism according to caste” (Huyler 1999, 41). The principle of one man, one vote led to “casteism”, or political

representation based on caste, and for the first time in the history of the caste system, the oppressed gained a means by which to benefit collectively within the context of caste conflict. Supposedly, caste holds less importance than in rural societies, “where disobeying caste rules can still get one killed. It is not possible to control who sits next to whom on a bus, in a factory or in

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<sup>80</sup>Alagodi refers here to: Bhatt, G. 1975. *Studies in Tulu History and Culture*. Kallianpur, pp. 226-241.

a restaurant” (Kolanad 1994, 40).<sup>81</sup> However, caste still determines who advances and who does not for the majority of modern Indians, and most Hindus would find it difficult to imagine a casteless social system. “Even the ancient association of caste with colour remains, and everyone wants a fair-skinned bride” (ibid, 41). “It (the caste system) embraces not only a very great majority of the population of India, but it forms the normal framework of society, and is intimately connected with its religious life. It has been found possible, therefore, not without apparent justification, to regard it as the very soul of this somewhat indeterminate, fluid collection of customs and beliefs which is called Hinduism” (Senart 1930, 13). “Even after death the great distinctions of caste are to be maintained. The virtuous Brahman goes to the abode of Brahma, the good Kshatriya to that of Indra, and the worthy Vaisya to that of the Maruts, and the dutiful Sudra to that of the Gandharvas.” (Oman 1907, 50).

Closely related to the caste system is what is known as the four *Ashramas* or stages of life. According to this pattern of thought, every individual soul born into the world passes through the following four stages of life development: (Childhood) Youth, Manhood, Middle Age and Old Age. These are described as the stages of *Brahmacharya* or student life; *Grhastha* or family life; *Vanaprastha* or retired life; and *Sanyasa* or life of renunciation. During the student life stage, individuals are to concentrate on chastity, temperance, simplicity, and devotion to knowledge and God. The duties of family life include hospitality, charity, industry, honesty, frugality, temperance, devotion to religion and service of mankind. The retired life usually begins after the age of 50 at which time the individual begins a secluded life focused on sacrifice, constant study of the Veda, readiness to give but not accept anything in return, and love and compassion for all living things. The fourth and final stage is an ascetic lifestyle in which the individual renounces everything in the world and rests, meditating on God, thereby becoming detached from all objects, indicating liberation from all bondage to the world.

## BRAHMANAS

Millions of the Brahman forward caste live in India today. “Although all members of the *varna* that originally comprised only priests and their families, most today are involved in other occupations, such as farming, teaching, and business. Nevertheless, all priests in major Hindu temples are Brahmanas, whose education and training are hereditary” (Huyler 1999, 41).

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<sup>81</sup> It was the impression of this writer while living in one of the larger cities in India, that caste holds a place of tremendous importance in urban centers just as it does in rural areas.

The Brahmanas who are intended to be priests are schooled from early childhood in the scriptures and rituals necessary to perform pujas and other Hindu ceremonies correctly. Priests must recite the ceremonies verbatim—to make an error in the recitation of sacred rituals could change the meaning of the ritual with unfortunate or even disastrous consequences. An example would be reciting perfectly the entire scriptures of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabhart*a, each of which are as long as the Christian Bible. Brahmanic priests believe it is their *karma* to be born as a priest and their *dharma* or duty to preserve the integrity of Hindu traditions. This is accomplished by maintaining absolute purity in all matters. Purity is considered more important than spirituality.

#### 4.1.4 Application for missionary strategy

It is obvious that major changes are needed in missionary strategy in India. The implications of the caste system for missionary strategy are numerous and are not new: “It is almost impossible to form a conception of the multitude of ramifications in the caste-system....Even the Brahmins are divided into innumerable subordinate castes, which mutually refuse to associate with each other. The usual reckoning of the castes as 3000 in number is only a summary taking account only of the chief castes. In South India alone there are said to be 19,000 caste divisions” (Warneck 1904, 282). Added to this is the prominence of interdependence among Indian people groups. “Not until one has spent a life service in India, does one begin to realize the sensitive, closely woven mesh of interrelated responsibilities, rights, and duties that have for at least two thousand years been the resistant fabric of India’s life.... The Hindu village community is a pattern based on the principle of graded interdependence” (Matthews 1938, 9). The prominent approach of converting individuals apart from their existing *oikos* has produced little other than a separate Christian culture into which many Indians find it difficult if not impossible to assimilate. Rajendran offers some honest insight at this point:

Many converts still find it difficult to enter and adapt to the traditional Christian cultures. The brave survive. Some others return to their comfortable communities. Those who survive with the traditional Christians said it took a long time to establish their credibility, unlike second and third generation Christians who had families to vouch for them. Ravi Kumar, a headmaster in a school, felt this even though he attended a Brethren Church. He felt they lacked concern. His marriage was delayed, due to the difficulty of finding a bride who

would be able to adjust to his family members. There was pressure from his family to marry a Hindu if he did not find a Christian bride. Girls converted from other faiths find life even more difficult. Unless the Church is willing to receive and train the new converts with sensitivity, it will be hard to establish them in the existing churches. Converts tend to wander from their present churches, slowing the number who could turn to Christ. With the current mind-set of Christians, there is much less hope for a mass movement to Christ by middle class and upper middle classes. We need a shift in the mindset to receive and nurture converts. Missionaries may like to be innovative here (Rajendran 1998, 132).

History has shown that people like to become Christian without crossing tribal, racial, class, or linguistic barriers. People like to become Christian with their own kind of people. Canjam Gamaliel, a Lutheran minister in the state of Kerala of India, has maintained that the Indian caste system should be seen as something God has used to help preserve Indian society. He believes that breaking this social structure, this order of preservation, is not a necessary part of becoming a Christian. He proposes that churches and missions should seek to plant churches among all castes with the understanding that these churches would remain one-caste denominations or part of the universal church (Gamaliel 1997, 72).

Gamaliel is confident that accepting Christ and accepting the Bible as God's Word will destroy the religious sanctions that make the Hinduism caste system possible. When the religious sanctions that under gird the caste system are gone, then the sense of separateness and class distinction will also disappear. It is likely that indigenous churches much like those proposed by Gamaliel will begin to appear more and more within India.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODEL AND STRATEGY THAT IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS AMONG FORWARD CASTE HINDUS**

#### **5.1 Toward a Dharmic Christianity**

##### **5.1.1 Introduction**

The primary and necessary criticism of Christianity in India is not that its teachings are heretical or false but that Christians do not participate in the Indian way of life. In fact, according to the present approach to Christianity in India it is not really possible for Indian Christians to participate in the Indian way of life. For many missionaries and other Westerners, these matters seem peripheral, “but in the Indian context it’s the way you live and act that matters, not what you believe” (Bharati 2004, I). It is highly significant that the proper name for Hinduism is “Sanatan Dharma,” or “the eternal duty of life.” In other words, one may believe whatever he or she likes, but she is expected to live out “dharma.” Religion is expected to participate in the values and customs of society, yet the vast majority of Christians in India are from the *dalit* background, i.e., tribals and untouchables. These argue that Christians want no part of dharma. Dalits have always strongly resented the Hindu way of life because they were excluded and demeaned by it. “Millions of dalits have become Christians precisely in protest against the dharmic way of life that had oppressed them for so many centuries” (ibid, ii). During a period of mass conversions among dalits to Christianity, the popular opinion was that by joining the Christian religion, dalits were not only rejecting an oppressive system but joining a higher civilization. In the South, there were enough converts to remain safely in their villages, but in the North, the few converts moved into the towns and cities to become part of the Western missionary compounds, essentially establishing a separate Christian caste.

These movements of socio-religious revolt by dalits against Hindus continue today under the conviction that the oppressive attitudes and practices of Hindu dharma will never change. Resultant mass movements

are often highly political, for converts change their voting patterns and social allegiances. “As dalits, Christian converts had no desire to be a part of the general culture, the dharma, of the nation. They resented and rejected it” (ibid, iii). It is important at this point to note that much of what goes under the name of Indian theology today is in actuality “dalit theology.” It is the theology of the dalit church that speaks to the 20% of the Indian population who are dalits, but does not speak to the 12% who are Muslim or the two-thirds who are in the Hindu castes. Dalit theology has a legitimate place in indigenous Indian Christian theology, but we must be clear that these forms and this theology do not speak to the vast majority of the land. The vast majority of Indians will never join the dalit church, meaning that it is unreasonable to expect the dalit church to have an effective outreach beyond its own dalit community (Benerjee 1997, 22-43).

The purpose of this paper is not to propose an indigenous Indian theology. It is, however, to show why the existing approach to evangelizing Hindus as well as the structures, practices, and thinking of existing Indian churches cannot relate to the Indians who are in the forward castes. Its purpose is also to propose an alternative approach that holds the most promise toward a church planting movement among forward caste Hindus in the future. The current approach of Indian Christians to being Christian and making converts is problematic. If a church planting movement is to take place among forward caste Hindus in India, it will have to take place outside the existing Indian church, and it will be inseparable from the development of a dharmic Christian way of life. It will have to be significantly different from the organized church that exists in India today, largely populated and determined by dalits. At the risk of sounding heretical, it will have to be a church characterized more by dharma than by theology. We will be informed in this task by the hundreds of thousands of *Jesu bhaktas* living outside the organized church. The hope for church planting movements among caste Hindus lies in showing how these *Jesu bhaktas* may remain steadfast in their faith and share it among their families and communities in each of the caste groups where *Jesu bhaktas* live and pray (Hoefler 2004, 10-13). The *Jesu bhaktas* are the key to developing church planting movements that are rooted in the dharmic soil where they live. If we respect the dharmic culture of India, love the people of India’s castes, and value indigenous expression of Christian devotion, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will flow smoothly and powerfully, with few unnecessary hindrances. If, however, we don’t, we will be just as unsuccessful in our future efforts to reach forward caste India as we have been in the past.

### 5.1.2 A living spirituality

Forward caste Indians do not need to add another religion in the form of Western Christianity. “Hinduism, alone, is called a parliament of religions” (Barrett 2001, 27). What is needed is a living spirituality—“the living Christ in His original form, as sent by God, lived by our Lord, witnessed by His disciples and promoted by His *bhaktas* (devotees) in the early centuries” (Bharati 2004, 3). Most evangelistic efforts among the forward castes has been what may be termed *kabaddi* evangelism; occasionally someone ventures to share the Gospel, only to immediately return to their comfortable compound, having completed their evangelistic duty.<sup>82</sup> These are what John Stott calls “evangelistic raids”:

Of course we make occasional evangelistic raids into enemy territory (that is our evangelical specialty); but then we withdraw again, across the moat, into our Christian castle (the security of our own evangelical fellowship), pull up the drawbridge, and even close our ears to the pleas of those who batter on the gate (Stott 1989, 14).

Even on popular public festival days such as *Diwali*, *Holi*, and *Rakhi*, Indian Christians largely refuse to visit their neighbor’s houses nor allow them to come to their own. Although the religious connection with these festivals is admittedly “pagan,” they are still vibrant social occasions that provide ample opportunity for social interchange. Would that be very far removed from early Christians and their alternative celebration of Christmas in light of pagan practice? The greatest tragedy is when Christian converts are discouraged from participating in their own family *functions* and common festivals, when the greatest importance of these festivals is social rather than religious. Dr. R. B. Rokhaya describes this practice in Nepal, but the same holds true in India:

Non-Christian festivals and rituals are only talked about in terms of temptation. During *Dasain* (*Dasera*), *Tihar* (*Diwali*) and national holidays, churches organize events in order to prevent people from going home and being tempted or forced to participate in the rituals. While Nepalis from all corners of the country and even from abroad travel home, Christians gather within the four safe walls of their churches. When people fail to abstain from rituals, for instance when

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<sup>82</sup> *Kabaddi* is an Indian game in which members of one team, while holding their breath, leave their safe area and try to touch members of the other team, running back to their side after exhausting their breath.

they cut their hair or wear white clothes after a family member has died, they are not allowed to enter the church (Rokhaya 1996, 31).

In reality, Indian Christians perpetuate a foreign “system” rather than a living spirituality.

#### 5.1.4 Toward a missiology of Hindu culture

When speaking of and promoting people movements as the preferred missionary approach among unreached peoples in general and Hindus in particular, it is important to note that this is not raising the group to place of undue importance but, instead, is emphasizing the importance of utilizing culturally specific and appropriate strategies. Bosch stretches our thinking along these lines in his magnum opus *Transforming Mission*. He suggests thirteen categories, some of which he develops at significant length, others of which are passed over relatively briefly. They are:

1. Mission as the Church-with-Others
2. Mission as *Missio Dei*
3. Mission as Mediating Salvation
4. Mission as the Quest for Justice
5. Mission as Evangelism
6. Mission as Contextualization
7. Mission as Liberation
8. Mission as Inculturation
9. Mission as Common Witness
10. Mission as Ministry by the Whole People of God
11. Mission as Witness to People of Other Living Faiths
12. Mission as Theology
13. Mission as Action in Hope (Bosch 1991, 368-510)

Mission as the Quest for Justice, Mission as Contextualization and Mission as Liberation, all speak, in albeit different keys, about the need to root mission in people's life situations, not least of which are the social, economic and political contexts. It is clear that Christianity can only be expressed within the language and other cognitive forms, symbols and behavior that make up the wide variety of human cultures. There is a wide diversity of vocabulary employed to explain how the Church meets with human cultures. Indigenization, Inculturation, Accommodation, Adaptation, Acculturation, Contextualization and others are all used by different people; sometimes to the same thing, sometimes very different things.



Bosch enlightens us as to the meaning of contextualization in relation to missiology and missionary strategy his section on “Mission as Contextualization.” Here he under girds a basic argument of his book that “from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it” (ibid, 421). Contextualization is not to be confused with “contextualism,” where contextualism refers to “universalizing one’s own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it” (ibid, 428). This paper does not advocate elevating people groups to a place of supreme importance, and actually stands in opposition to contextualism. In actuality, by insisting we understand Hindu culture and religion and plan our church planting strategies accordingly (contextualizing), we are opposing the contextualism of the West that raises the individual to an extra-biblical and paramount importance. The Church learns to speak to human cultures by engaging with their language, symbol systems and meaning frames. Yet in doing this, the Church learns from human cultures and grows in her understanding of the Gospel revealed to her. Church Planting Movement strategy is not uncritical of culture but instead sees it as the key to naturally unlocking resistant and hidden peoples to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At present, to join an Indian church or become a “Christian” has primarily social implications and repercussions. Each denomination has its own particular caste status and joining their church means becoming a member of that distinct and exclusive social grouping. “The correct description of the religious reality, at least in Madras City, is not that Christianity is a Harijan religion but a Harijan Church” (Hoeffler 2001, 98). Christianity is only another community among many Indian communities rather than being a church that permeates all communities with the salt and light of the gospel. No doubt this is largely the result of well intentioned evangelistic effort divorced from thoroughgoing cultural understanding. Most certainly a different Church would emerge if evangelistic efforts followed rather than ignored Hindu understanding of *satsanghs*, *melas* and marriages, sacred writings, folk songs, proverbs, etc.

The average Hindu knows little about his or her own religion. Like the average Christian, he or she grows up faithfully keeping all the traditions of his or her own society as a part of religious duty (*dharma*). This does in the least imply that he or she agrees with those traditions or even understands the majority of them. Religious duty is passed on through tradition, often without any firsthand knowledge or seeking. As a result of this void of understanding, most converts to Christianity criticize their past

religious faith, without discerning the difference between religious tradition and Indian culture. “A Hindu convert will start to see that everything in his new-found faith with its Western *masalas* (spices) in Christian society is not only right but marvelous. After several years of experience, he will realize that he was wrong in his judgment on both sides. But now, to accept that he has made some mistakes in his judgment of both sides becomes a prestige for him” (Bharati 2004, 26). This leads to an uncritical examination of Hindu religion, resulting in discarding viable cultural practices that may be a better conduit for the spread of Christianity than established Christianity itself.

Admittedly, new believers in India, especially those from the forward castes and particularly those who have come to Christ individually, must struggle to assimilate their Christian faith while trying to survive. This requires confessing one’s newfound faith in Christ as a Christ *bhakta* within his or her own community. The neophyte faces a complex maze of issues and problems. Unfortunately, the easiest response historically has been for the convert to leave the community in exchange for a new Christian community, essentially becoming a member of a new caste and severing ties with one’s own household. In order to penetrate the forward castes, new believers must be helped to face their complex problems as true *bhakatas* of Christ in their own communities and families. Extraction is not the solution for the opposition and persecution a new believer may face. We must move from being satisfied with gaining one “convert” to equipping and encouraging him or her to reach the whole family and community. This will consist primarily of helping the believer to promote the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ within the community as he or she begins to live out the new values and vision of Christ. Why should a Christ *bhakta* be deprived of being a part of his or her family and community? This is not an aspect of contextualization of the gospel as contextualization is needed for an outsider to communicate the gospel in a different culture. This is not equipping the new believer to contextualize the gospel as a stranger but to naturally live it out in his or her own cultural and social situation.

#### 5.1.5 Religion or discipleship?

Many Indians blame the Christian church for facilitating social disintegration, and say that Hinduism finds its strength in its well-integrated familial system. Arguably, Hinduism successfully maintains its grip on every aspect of Hindu life through the caste system, substantiating in surface fashion the concept that Hinduism contributes to family cohesion, or at least

helps to maintain it. The context of Hinduism is actually ripe for family-focused evangelism that employs the biblical approach of *oikos* or household evangelism. This is especially true in urban India, since Indian cities show a pattern of settlement according to caste and kinship group. This indicates that persons do not break familial ties even after they move to the city. “Even urban dwellers in India consider family loyalty a virtue” (Hrangkuma<sup>83</sup> 2004, 1). The gospel must spread in a way that strengthen one’s family loyalties rather than challenge them or seek to dismantle them. “Understanding group patterns of decision-making, close-knit family units, interpersonal relationships, and networking is essential for urban evangelism in India” (ibid, 2).

Indians often interpret conversion as a negative social act when the action is taken by an individual rather than a familial group. Such sentiment is expressed by K. S. Sudarshan of a radical Hindu political party: “America is India’s worst foreign enemy as it is funding missionary organizations for practicing conversion” (Olsen 2004, 21). Sudarshan claims that the CIA is running Joshua I, a nonexistent program purportedly led by Billy Graham to convert all Indians to Christianity. Though often thought of as only a religion, Hinduism is actually a system that influences every aspect of society. When individuals depart their traditional religion, they are considered traitors because what they are leaving, in actuality, is a complex and tightly integrated social system. If the church encourages individuals to become Christians, further penetration of the gospel will usually stop there. Family members will probably expel that person, thus firmly closing the door to the gospel for that larger family system. “Indians consider this an act of rebellion and a blow to family solidarity. But if sufficient time is given for the families, kinship networks, and close social groups to think about and make decisions for Christ, then a wider penetration of the gospel is possible. This way there is considerably less resistance from Hindu peers, relatives, and community members. This helps to maintain family coherence” (ibid, 2).

In India, society is organized but religion is not. Hindus have neither a pope nor bishop to direct their religious life. Hindus never accept any appointed leader as their spiritual guru as all their *acharyas* (teachers) and *gurus* are recognized and accepted voluntarily. In the case of selected leaders within any tradition (e.g. the Sankaracharyas), one has complete individual freedom to either accept or reject him. For the typical Hindu, the *pandit* (Hindu priest), *padri* (Christian pastor) and *maulvie* (Muslim clergy)

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<sup>83</sup> A quote by Atul Y. Aghamkar who ministers in two cities in central India with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, primarily as a church planter and pastor.

are not spiritual *gurus* and *acharyas* but social leaders that conduct ceremonies connected to birth, marriage and death.

When the European missionaries came to India, they brought with them an organized religion and tried to impose it in an organized society and it never worked out. Hindu leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen, who, following the pattern of Western Church systems, tried to organize Hindu religion (called the Renaissance Movements) ended in failure, e. g. Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Church of the New Dispensation (Nava-vidhan), etc. The moment a few people decide to follow Christ, we immediately organize them into a religious structure with a particular denominational brand (Bharati 2004, 41).

The average Hindu will never find any appeal in organized religion. For the kingdom of God to expand among forward caste Hindus, we must follow the spontaneity of the early church without organizing people in way that runs counter to Hindu culture. In Hinduism, personal freedom is ascribed to every individual in the arena of spirituality. “Thus has this wisdom, more secret than secrecy itself, been imparted to you by Me. Fully pondering it, do as you like” (Bhagavad Gita 18:63). According to this way of thinking, a *guru* is not one’s spiritual authority but a fellow spiritual pilgrim, guiding as well as traveling together based on his experience.

Without proper understanding of these facts, present day Indian Christians are perpetuating their traditional approach of converting people into “organized Christianity.” These efforts are succeeding in winning sporadic proselytes for a time, but are not ushering in God’s kingdom among Indians, especially those of the forward castes. The moment a few individuals are “won to Christ,” they are immediately organized as a religious group and placed under a religious/spiritual authority. Accompanying this unnatural development are more unnatural impositions. The first of these artificial impositions is the church building, immediately limiting spiritual growth to the boundaries of structured religion. In Hindu homes, religious teachings are given by parents and elders, and there is no parallel to what is done in Christian churches by Sunday School teachers, youth ministers, or pastors. Spirituality is learned within the framework of their cultural and social grouping and not under the guidance of any appointed leader. About this, Schmidt says:

By replacing parents as the chief source of Christian education, the church, in effect, discourages Christian education in the home and

communication between parents and their children on subjects of ultimate meaning and morality.

Several tragedies have come about because of the institutionalization of Christian education. The first is that there has come into existence a large gap between Christian knowledge and Christian living....Unless Christian education gets released from its bondage to the church and gets back into the home, it will be increasingly difficult for the teachers because it is largely irrelevant to the students.

The second tragedy is that questions of ultimate meaning and morality are taken out of the family circle. When the big questions come up on death, suffering, and choice of vocation, few in the family are willing to approach them religiously. Religious subjects, except in the case of a few dedicated families are almost universally avoided....Harry Wendt, the notable Christian educator, has said that the difference between Jesus' educational methods and our own is this: While we educate children and play with adults, Jesus played with children and educated adults  
(Schmidt 1999, 57).

The Hindu aims more for personal spirituality rather than a religious system to be a part of. Without this understanding, Indian Christians, like the Western missionaries before them, insist on imposing organized religion and so strangle church growth and multiplication. Wherever a church building is constructed, religion is organized, and there the church growth is stopped.

The main reason church growth halts in India is that organized Christianity soon becomes culturally irrelevant as non-essentials gain priority over the gospel. Is the academic study of theology essential? Are musical instruments, hymnbooks, Sunday Schools, preachers, staff salaries, church buildings and budgets essential to discipleship? In the final analysis, none of these are essential to the practice or spread of Christianity. Many of these and others like them are neutral activities, making them appropriate for certain cultural contexts. These same activities may, however, be detrimental in dissimilar cultural contexts. What is worse is when these Christian peripherals are presented so strongly that people in the two-thirds world do not have the opportunity to let their own culture supply them with more appropriate customs and structures. "The glorious gospel which began in Palestine as a relationship with a Person, when it moved to Greece became a philosophy, then on to Rome and became an institution, spread all

over Europe and became a culture and then moved to North America and became an enterprise” (Kamalesan 1980, 4). What is the solution to this? We must follow the New Testament pattern and evangelize Hindus within their *oikos*, allow them to remain Hindus culturally and socially, thus maintaining their place in the family, becoming a solitary *bhakta* of Jesus Christ until another member of the household follows his or her example.

Herbert E. Hoefler, in his book, *Churchless Christianity* indicates that there are larger numbers of Christ-followers among the Hindus than there are in the churches of Tamil Nadu. He issues a call to the church to do something for these “Churchless Christians” in Hindu society (Hoefler 2001, 3-45). Hoefler is not promoting secret believers or undercover disciples. Instead, he challenges Indian believers to maintain their Hindu cultural identity and take the gospel inside their respective families as leaven in the dough. Bharati uses different words to express the same idea. “Christ’s warning of the salt losing its savor is not our problem; rather that the salt sits in a lump and is not spread out to do its flavoring or preserving work; the leaven is not in the lump but is carefully removed and preserved (and thus rendered useless)” (Bharati 2004, 54). The Pauline concept of church is clearly not that of a separate community, shut off from its sociological context. “Nevertheless, each one should *retain* the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches” (1 Co 7:17, emphasis added).

This does not justify private faith by appealing to membership in the universal church. Nor does it encourage Christianity to be exercised in isolation and therefore is not to be confused with the concept of Hoekendijk and others like him. As regards the relation of the organized church to the mission of the gospel, one of the most provocative voices of our time is that of a former missionary and professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Hans Hoekendijk. For him the church “happens” or comes into existential being through the proclaimed Word of God. He rejects church growth and extension and the proselytism involved in it. This kind of “occasional congregationalism” hopes that the church will “happen” where the Word is preached. No permanent church is involved or desired. This is a theoretical conception; it has little biblical or historical support, yet it does stress an aspect of the Christian mission that is critical (Hoekendijk 1968, 259-264).

Although Hindus uphold individual freedom in spirituality, Hinduism is far from void of community expressions of faith and life. For example, in

the Vedic period, a householder could not perform *yajna* (sacrifice) without the cooperation of his wife if he wished to go to heaven. “Except in the case of a *sanyati* (one who renounced), the whole life of Hindu society is a corporate affair striving for *dharma*, *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). Especially the *samskaras* (ceremonies) are always family and community celebrations, with both their religious and social significance” (Bharati 2004, 56). Comparing Hindu *puja* (worship) in the home with Christian worship under a roof in the name of “church” reveals an inadequate understanding of both. A local congregational life is the natural outgrowth of and proponent for biblical discipleship, but we should foster a radical openness to the possibility of whole new structures and patterns that may prove far more biblical than the Western church models traditionally imposed.

#### 5.1.6 A proposed model and strategy

In light of all that has been stated previously, the time has come to propose a new model and specific strategy for encouraging church planting movements among forward caste Hindus. “The Christian message to the Hindu must never be merely a Christianized version of Hinduism, but it does need to give to the authentic Christian faith a truly Indian form of expression” (Hogg 1947, 7). Each component of the proposed model and strategy will be stated and then later described in length:

1. Encourage discipleship that allows the *bhakta* to remain a part of Hindu culture and the family system.
2. Evangelize naturally within one’s own *oikos* and in this way crossover into intersecting households.
3. Realize a church is established when more than one member of a household becomes a Christ *bhakta* and they come together to fulfill the purposes of a local church.
4. Christian *gurus* following a Pauline model will offer spiritual guidance on a regional and circuit basis.
5. Churches will never have a building, paid leadership or established programs. Instead, they will be entirely organic.

#### 1. ENCOURAGE DISCIPLESHIP THAT ALLOWS THE *BHAKTA* TO REMAIN A PART OF HINDU CULTURE AND THE FAMILIAL SYSTEM.

The rationale for this component has been previously established. Only in remaining a vital part of one’s family system will the gospel have

the potential for spreading naturally and igniting a church planting movement. When individuals are extracted from their natural and God-given environment, evangelism stops and a church planting movement becomes impossible. The major difference between this approach and the traditional Western approach to evangelism and follow-up is lack of immediate connection with a larger group of disciples. This approach acknowledges Hindu emphasis on individual freedom as well as the importance of remaining within the family for immediate and future impact.

From the beginning of the Christian Church, it is evident that men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, caste, and class barriers. If then, to become Christian the Church requires men to worship in other than their own mother tongue, or marriage outside their normal marriage market, 'break caste,' or renounce their own culture, she is imposing a man-made and unnecessary barrier. To become a Christian must be a religious decision rather than racial. It must be seen as a move to make Jesus Christ supreme in one's life—and not as merely a move from one social group to another. Whenever it is presented as a racial move ('Come join our caste, leave your caste'), the growth of the Church is exceedingly low. In presenting the Gospel to the world, the main problem the Church has to deal with is how to present Christ so that men can truly follow Him without leaving their kindred (Subbamma 1970, 53).

New believers should *not* become members of the existing church in the area. Concerning the situation in Andhra Pradesh, Paul Rajaiah writes:

The Indian Christians have always stood aloof from the rest of the citizens as a distinct community and have segregated themselves socially and intellectually—or perhaps have been pushed out by the other communities. The Indian Christian has always been regarded, with considerable justification, as a 'stranger in his own land and alien to his own culture' (Rajaiah 1972, 108).

According to Scripture, the gospel is a stumbling block and offence to natural man (Romans 9:32).<sup>84</sup> To become a disciple of Christ, one must accept the offence of the cross, the *scandalon*. The evangelist must not omit this and the believer cannot avoid it. But on the other hand, Scripture tells us to refrain from placing inappropriate and unnecessary stumbling blocks in

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<sup>84</sup> "As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'" (New International Version)



the path of persons coming to Christ. In Isaiah 57:14 we read, “And it will be said, ‘Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of the people’” (NIV). The Apostle Paul states in Romans 14:13, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (NIV). And again in 1 John 2:10 we read, “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble” (NIV).

In India it is made very difficult and almost impossible for the forward caste people to become Christians by putting unscriptural offences in their way—they are compelled to join the church of a very different homogenous unit. Any forward caste person who becomes a Christian and joins an existing church is identified with the dalits and is considered dead to his or her family and his or her own community. The potential of being salt and light in one’s own household is removed before it begins. The true body of Christ is casteless, but to make it as a precondition for an individual to become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is unscriptural and counterproductive. “By putting undue emphasis on the caste issue, we are pleading more for social change than for spiritual conversion” (Subbamma 1970, 75-76). This is an unnecessary offence we are erecting in the way of those who would come to Christ. Bishop Leslie Newbigin decried establishing social barriers of any kind for Hindus to become Christians.

I would encourage a believing Hindu to become a Christian. I will not say to him: Become one of us, a Christian like me and follow all the habits and customs you see among the people called Christians (Newbigin 1969, 110).

Here, Newbigin encourages an appeal to the Hindu for a change of faith, but not the change of community. Gustav Warneck stated this concern in 1904:

Conversion to Christianity always involves loss of caste, and this implies a social isolation which threatens even the means of existence. If a considerable number of the members of one caste are gained for Christianity, the members of every other caste bar themselves against it. The greatest evil of all would be if the Christian society itself came to be regarded as a caste. And thus caste, and the relation of Christianity to it, constitute one of the most difficult problems of Indian missions (Warneck 1904, 282-283)

“To be a Christian from the New Testament perspective is to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not mean simply to belong to a Christian community” (David 1998, 10). Nor, it should be added, does it

primarily mean to belong to a certain Christian community. Living as a disciple means to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ over one's total life and to seek daily to live in love and obedience toward him. Christian discipleship is not adherence to a program but obedience to a person. When this allegiance is lived out personally within one's own family and community, we are effectively communicating the gospel, so long as the disciple is still considered a member of the family and community. Christianity's failure in India has been the extrication of the new convert from family and community and placement in an artificial one that then actually prevents New Testament evangelization from occurring. Without the natural process of "impact discipleship," all other attempts to share Christ will be unnatural and, for the most part, ineffective.<sup>85</sup> Those won to Christ

through such artificial methodology are doomed to lead a Christian existence that will never be culturally indigenous and therefore true salt and light in their communities.

This must be distinguished from what may be termed Hinduization. The appeal here is *not* for Hinduization of Christian theology and Hinduization of Christian practice. George David writes of seeing a painting in which *Vishnu* is displayed as hanging on the cross with his golden crown on his head. That picture conveys anything but the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and is in fact a total distortion of the gospel (ibid, 12). That is Hinduization of the gospel, not indigenization. What we are appealing for is the need to practice the life of discipleship in appropriate indigenous forms, within the context of cultural traits that are in harmony with the gospel and those that are neutral in the sense that they are neither right nor wrong. Practicing disciples may trust the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide as to the proper use of indigenous forms and to avoid those that are improper (Inbanatham 1956, 27-41).

The New Testament concept of discipleship is very much in harmony with the thought patterns of India. Jesus referred to himself as *Rabbi*, meaning "Master." In India the proper translation would be *Guru*. There is also the concept of *sat guru*. The *sat guru* is a spiritual guide who himself is perfected and has experienced fully the highest spiritual attainments. As a result, he is able to help those who enter into a *diksa* or a bond of discipleship with him or her. The student (*shishiya*) or follower acknowledges the authority of the *guru*

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<sup>85</sup> This term is one that the author uses to describe the natural and yet profound evangelistic impact of a disciple who lives in obedience and absolute surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

and is attached to him. Only a *sat guru* can guide a *shishiya* and liberate him or her from spiritual bondage. This concept of the master/disciple or *sat guru/shishiya* relationship so clearly seen in the New Testament is an indigenous concept for Hindus. In other words, to be a Christian means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect *sat guru* because he was

sinless by birth and sinless by *karma* (Bharati 2004, 110-131).

The basic call to discipleship is stated in Matthew 11:28-30:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

This command of the Lord Jesus Christ is addressed personally to every human being and demands a personal response from each. Our response must be to enter into this *diksa*, this bond of discipleship with Jesus Christ as our *sat guru*. This is a covenant relationship—not a temporary one but a lifelong relationship. In verse twenty nine, Jesus calls all disciples to bend their necks to his yoke and learn of him. This is a clear call to a life of practicing discipleship. “There is a special Indian word for one who practices a spiritual discipline, *sadhak*. If we are to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ we have to be a *sadhak*. It comes from the word *sadhena*, which denotes a means of attaining spiritual life. One who practices a *sadhena* is a *sadhak* (David 1998, 55-64).

The life of discipleship is also described as a life of *bhakti* or devotion. The individual disciple may be called a *bhakta*. As the disciple responds day by day to Christ’s love with love of his or her own, he or she is practicing Christian *bhakti*. The *sadhak* or *bhakta* is able to respond to Christ with several different *sadhenas*. Mature fruitfulness is a *sadhena* in the practice of Christian discipleship. Another *sadhena* is cultivating a life of purity. The Lord Jesus Christ is our supreme example as he has a character of perfect purity or *nishkalanka* (Braybrooke 1973, 73). When we associate with him he purifies our character and refines us. The practice of Christian *bhakti* is also a life of *aradhana* or worship. As we practice daily *bhakti*, the Lord Jesus Christ gives us *darshan*, the ability to see his glory. When we receive this spirit of revelation or response is *aradhana*. It has been stated that there are at least ten *sadhenas* attached to practice of Christian *bhakti*:

1. *Diksa*—Voluntary submission to the yoke of Christ
2. *Aradhana*—Worship

3. *Dhyana*—Christian meditation on the Word of God
4. *Prema*—Brotherly love
5. *Meekness*—Servanthood
6. *Suffering*—The cross
7. *Union with Christ*—The Holy Spirit (David 1998, 43-54)

In summary, the practice of Christian discipleship begins with an act of complete and absolute surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an act of *diksa* or entering into a covenant relationship with our Lord and *sat guru*, Jesus Christ. As a *sadhak*, one practices this life of discipleship quite naturally within the Indian context of family and community, in forms that are indigenous to that culture. This life of discipleship will not only appear natural but will be all the more attractive to Hindus as it is lived out in a familiar Indian form. The most unnatural step would be for the new *sadhak* or *bhakta*, who is approaching his or her *sadhena* in a completely familiar and acceptable manner, to then leave the family to become part of a “foreign” community. This is, in essence, what we are asking each time we ask a convert to Christianity to join an existing congregation of believers. And in so doing, the convert has forfeited any real potential for being salt and light among his or her family and community.

## 2. EVANGELIZE NATURALLY WITHIN ONE’S OWN *OIKOS* AND IN THIS WAY CROSSOVER INTO INTERSECTING HOUSEHOLDS.

It has already been established in this paper that the *oikos* approach to evangelism is the most natural and most New Testament form of evangelism, therefore, it is not necessary to restate this fact. What does need to be explained is the connection between the person of peace concept, the *oikos* approach to evangelism, Christian *bhakti*, and church planting movements.

When an individual surrenders to and acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and is the first to do so from his or her Hindu family, he or she is, in effect, the person of peace for that family. No outside influence is needed to reach that family of Christ as all that is needed to reach the entire *oikos* is the *bhakti* of that one new believer, lived out before the *oikos* in terms that are entirely familiar to them. He or she must not be attached to an existing Christian church as that would serve to immediately remove his or her influence as person of peace for that *oikos*. Those who would argue against this would have hundreds of years of missionary history to explain.

Under the present system—where converts have to propose to their relatives that they become Christians in another ethnic unit—there is very little possibility for the caste community to accept Jesus Christ as *Guru* and Savior. Usually baptism is presented as necessary for membership. But of the many that hear and wish to accept the Gospel, very few find it possible to accept baptism which so thoroughly identifies them with another community in the neighborhood.

A few do accept baptism. These, however, feel they have done the ultimate, are satisfied with themselves, and do not go any further. Baptism which should be the beginning of the Christian life becomes the end of it. Having surmounted the huge hurdle of baptism in what they believe to be the Harijan Church, converts feel there is little else to do in the matter (Subbamma 1970, 78).

The radical nature of this proposal is that Christian discipleship or *bhakti* is best allowed to develop naturally and indigenously when it commences and continues for a time apart from membership or participation in any existing Christian community. An essential part of Christian *bhakti* is to serve as salt and light as one lives out the commands and love of Jesus Christ, and this is best accomplished when the *bhakta* remains naturally connected to his or her Hindu family. In this way, he or she is free to function as the person of peace for that *oikos* and becomes the conduit for other family members to also establish *diksa* with the Lord Jesus Christ as *sat guru*.

Non-Christian relatives and friends can hear the Gospel while the converts worship and witness right in the midst of their kith and kin. If it is a rural area, the whole village will have an opportunity to know what Christianity is. I believe this is both the New Testament and the natural way of communicating the Gospel (ibid, 79).

This leads naturally to the next component of this new model and strategy.

### 3. REALIZE A CHURCH IS ESTABLISHED WHEN MORE THAN ONE MEMBER OF A HOUSEHOLD BECOMES A CHRIST *BHAKTA* AND THEY COME TOGETHER TO FULFILL THE PURPOSES OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH.

#### *Biblical Model of House Churches*

House churches were the norm in biblical times. Indeed, for more than the first one hundred years of the early church, most churches were house churches. “Floyd V. Filson writes an exhaustive account of ‘the significance of the early house churches.’ Basing his comments on Scriptural evidence, he says that house churches were in existence from the very first days of the Church. When the Christians wanted to meet as Christians, the homes of the members suited them best” (ibid, 79). As the Christian movement spread throughout Asia Minor, the same development occurred in all places. When the synagogue was closed to Christians, the house church played a vital role.

There are numerous examples of house churches mentioned in the New Testament. Priscilla and Aquila made their home a center of Christian fellowship and teaching (1 Co 16:19). There is specific mention of a prayer meeting in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12). It is assumed that this was a normal and regular occurrence. Even when house churches are not mentioned specifically, their existence may be accurately inferred. The “Italians” mentioned in Hebrews may well have been a house church of Christians from that people group (Heb 10:25; 13:24). A study of the Acts and epistles reveals that the primary place where believers are said to have gathered on a regular basis was the home. Nearly twenty times, we read of Christians worshipping in the home of a believer. Four times the expression “the church in the house” is specifically used (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 2).

#### *Historical Development of the House Church or Small Group Concept*

This simple pattern of home meetings was disrupted by persecution and dispersion, and then by a gradual infiltration of pagan and legalistic ideas, so that by the time of the Second Century AD there was already a desire to reform the Church and reestablish the simplicity and purity of the home groups. The pattern had been set: a repeated move towards organization and then subjugation, followed by a reactionary stand by a few

dissenters breaking away to establish smaller informal groups that practiced the original "body-ministry" style of leadership and worship. This pattern, begun in the first centuries AD, has persisted to this day.

The Monastic movement arose for many reasons including the quest for restoration from a corrupt Church system, the awareness that the Cathedral was not the ideal place for interpersonal relationships, and the search for community and fellowship. However, it rarely if ever broke free from the teachings of Rome. There were many differences between the monastic cells and the home-based groups of dissenters such as the Waldensians. In particular, the clerical rule was adhered to in Monasteries where a strict hierarchical order was observed, whereas many dissenters and reformers gathered as individuals with a less developed structure of leadership or none at all (Dillenberger 1954, 134-176).

Following on from the Monastic movement, small groups who wanted to see the Church reformed, gathered around individuals or beliefs and in most cases reestablished the home group system. From the 16th century, many more groups arose with reforming zeal, including the Anabaptists, Moravians, Hutterites and Mennonites, and it is noticeable that during their informal meetings the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit were once again practiced. The Pietist movement (or, perhaps "movements," as there were so many) sprang up following the Reformation and persisted as late as the mid-1800s. Pietism was seen as a kind of second phase of the Reformation. An interesting feature of Pietism was the formation of cell groups, which were called "conventicles." "This explains a salient feature of ... the pivotal role played by small groups in the assimilation of Christians into the central privileges and responsibilities of the faith. The *collegia pietatis* or *ecclesiola in ecclesia* were vital to the spread of pietism" (Abraham 1989, 129).

John and Charles Wesley and their co-workers were influenced by Pietism although they remained loyal members of the Anglican Church. "Wesley's evangelism required and depended upon the development of class meetings and a plethora of other groups"<sup>86</sup> (ibid, 129). Having experienced an awakening in which thousands of new converts needed teaching and care, they turned to small groups to meet the need. The answer to an influx of new converts began in Bristol where Wesley's Society had grown to 1,100 people. A society member by the name of Foy suggested that one person call

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<sup>86</sup> An important analysis of these groups may be found in David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting, its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985).

on eleven others during the week to inquire of their status. The Bristol Society was quickly transformed. These weekly visitations soon became weekly class meetings. Soon, every Methodist Society was broken into smaller Classes of 12 persons who met weekly with a Class Leader for pastoral care, examination, encouragement and exhortation. According to Wesley, "Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens,' and naturally to 'care for each other.' As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other."

The "Class," consisting of 12 people pursuing the discipline of Christian godliness, became the centerpiece of Methodism for the next 100 years, until the mid 1800's. It was in the Class that the "awakened" were trained, examined and instructed, and where they shared mutual fellowship and learned to bear one another's burdens. It was in the Class that the "Rules" (those standards of behavior expected of every Methodist) were read and where individuals were examined to see if they were sincere in their desire to live according to Methodist discipline. Eventual membership in the greater Methodist Society was contingent upon a probationary period in the Class. People whose lives appeared to genuinely mirror their profession would be recommended for full membership. Those who continued in their old ways and demonstrated no willingness to change their walk would eventually be excluded from the weekly Class and the quarterly Love Feast. This was accomplished by a system of "tickets." A written ticket (eventually printed) would be issued once every three months, by Wesley or by the Class leader, to those Class members who were in good standing. This gained them entry to the Class meeting for the next three months and to the quarterly Love Feast. Then new tickets would be issued. Those members who by their lives had demonstrated growth in grace were given new tickets. Those who failed to attend meetings or whose lives had otherwise called their profession into question were not issued new tickets until they had demonstrated genuine repentance and a desire to renew their pursuit of Christian godliness (Dillenberger 1954, 176-193).

#### *Application of Biblical and Historical Models of House Churches to India*

It has been pointed out that there are numerous advantages of using house churches among the caste communities of India.

1. Hindus are accustomed to this kind of fellowship and worship.



2. If the system is Christianized, they feel quite at home in it and participate easily in it.
3. This is most important for the spiritual life of members. The Word of the Lord in hymns and Bible passages gets through to them.
4. Meeting in the home avoids much of the unreality fostered by putting on special clothes to go to hear the Gospel in a “church building” in the residential quarters of an ethnic unit which they consider very different to their own.
5. Through house churches, we demonstrate Christianity in the midst of the non-Christian community. Each new house exposes a new set of intimates and relatives (ibid, 82-83)

While this is admittedly a much better approach to reaching Hindus, especially forward caste Hindus, than the traditional Western missionary approach of extracting new believers and establishing essentially a Christian caste without any hope of widely influencing the Hindu community, it stops short of establishing a truly indigenous expression of Christ *bhakti* that leads to a Church Planting Movement. A far better approach is the natural conclusion to the discoveries of this paper, a truly indigenous expression of Christ *bhakti*.

When more than one member of an *oikos* becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ through the influence of the person of peace for that *oikos* (the first Christ *bhakta* of the *oikos*), the pair or small group within the family are able to fulfill the purposes of a New Testament church. While it is impossible to find commonality concerning the nature of a New Testament church, a helpful definition would be that a local church is a prophetic community of faith. This brief statement concerning the nature of the church contains three key elements. First, it states that a local church must be prophetic. That means to call for change in the lives of others and to make a positive contribution toward that change. This is exactly what it means to be “salt and light” according to Christ’s description in Matthew 5, and this is readily available to any number of believers within an *oikos*. Secondly, the definition indicates that a church is a community. This invokes the “two or more” expressions of the New Testament.<sup>87</sup> There are no numerical requirements for local churches in the New Testament and any attempt to establish a numerical requirement is done without any textual support. Instead, each purpose of a local church may be expressed and fulfilled by as few as two believers. Only two are necessary for water baptism. Two are able to experience communion. Two are all that are

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<sup>87</sup> Mt 18:15-20; Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1ff.

required to intercede for one another. Two may practice biblical evangelism as well as any larger number of believers. In fact, the evangelistic strategy of Jesus was clearly that of sending out teams of two. A clear example of Christ's strategy may be seen in Luke 10:1-24. Two may engage in corporate worship as well as two hundred. Finally, a church is founded on personal and corporate faith in Jesus Christ. This may be expressed profoundly by as few as two who are seeking to practice Christian *bhakti*.

This approach may be considered the truest form of house church and is entirely appropriate for Hindu culture that places enormous emphasis on the home and family as the locus for spiritual development. Once again, it functions well within the Hindu family structure because it has not introduced a foreign concept of spiritual development nor has it required the Christ *bhakta* to identify with an unacceptable caste. This is acceptable if one's concern is primarily with spiritual development rather than social change.

#### 4. CHRISTIAN *GURUS* FOLLOWING A PAULINE MODEL WILL OFFER SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE ON A REGIONAL AND CIRCUIT BASIS.

The Apostle Paul provides the most appropriate model for leadership development for these small groups of gathered believers. Rather than a shepherd model for a local church, his is a regional *guru* model. Paul did stay in a few places for an extended period of time (e.g. Ephesus), but primarily his was one of missionary endeavor with connected spiritual responsibility for young churches and young church leaders. He was, for all practical purposes, the leading *guru* for the believers in Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, etc. (Singh 2001, 3-5).

All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore able to grow in understanding of spiritual truth. However, God does gift and call certain individuals to teach and provide leadership for groups of believers. S. K. Bhattacharya studied the Mech tribe of Western-Duars. The Mechs are in a process of change due to adoption of Christian religion.

“The process involving the conversion of a Mech to Christianity is very simple. The Pastor comes along with some others to the house of one who wants conversion and the Bible is read. Everybody listens to Bible with rapt attention. Some Christian hymns are chanted. Prayers are offered. Then some amount of water is kept ready in a pot. The Pastor sprinkles this water on all corners of the house of the convert, specially at the root of the *Siju* plant. The *Siju* Plant is thrown out

from its place by the Pastor. *Mainao*, the Goddess of Kitchen is given a farewell forever. After the observance of such rituals, all those present are entertained with tea and tiffin. When this is over, the person concerned is declared as a Christian.” (Bhattacharya 1999, 118-119, grammar is the author’s)

Such spiritual guides will be essential in this non-traditional approach to Christian discipleship and church planting. With clusters of believers being small initially and perhaps eventually as well, Christian *gurus* will be required to travel some distance and be available to believers on a regional basis.

5. CHURCHES WILL NEVER HAVE A BUILDING, PAID LEADERSHIP OR ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS. INSTEAD, THEY WILL BE ENTIRELY ORGANIC.

Building church buildings has never been a productive method of evangelizing Hindus. “For the mission or the existing Church to invest money in buildings in caste sections may not be a wise thing to do. Especially in pioneer projects, that money can be used for many other things which are essential for communicating the Gospel” (Subbamma 1970, 84). The need for such a building-free, contextually appropriate approach to church planting will only increase in importance as opposition to evangelization continues to strengthen. “A man external obstacle for evangelization in Rajasthan, as indeed elsewhere in India, originates in fundamentalist Hindus, the Sangh Parivar, whose animosity and opposing activity have increased in proportion to the increase of their political power” (Lesser 1998, 65-66).

## 6. CONCLUSION

We see clearly now that the traditional approach to evangelism and church planting in India has failed and actually served to contradict its intended outcome. “The principle of group action in religion, as we have already indicated, was encountered in the earliest years of Protestant missions in India. But the policies generally adopted by missionaries placed many restrictions upon the spread of Christian faith by that principle. Fear that converts would be led astray by their associations led many missionaries to protect them by isolation upon the mission compound and by a paternalism that resulted in the adoption of western social patterns and modes of life”<sup>88</sup> (Warner, Pickett, Van Duren, Oliver, Carruthers, Rice, Azariah and Jones 1938, 42). Missionary efforts have, in effect, produced a separate caste for Christians, thereby removing believers from their familial systems and reducing their potential for spiritual influence. ‘Caste Christians’ relinquish the ability of influencing their “households” (*oikos*), which is the normal New Testament means of propagating the gospel and making converts.

In addition, we see that Indians prefer to make decisions as a group or family, rendering the western individualistic approach to “deciding for Christ” ineffective and counter productive. As a result, this author proposes that the best way to facilitate a church planting movement among Hindus is to refrain from planting churches. In other words, the contextually appropriate approach to evangelizing forward caste Hindus is to allow converts to remain as vital parts of their familial systems and make disciples according to accepted Hindu patterns of spiritual guidance. In time, converts will influence other family members toward Christ and, together, become a ‘house church’ in the truest sense of the term. This non church planting method of facilitating a church planting movement among Hindu people groups may sound contradictory, but will actually liberate from the ineffective and counter productive traditional missionary methods of the past in India and usher in the first church planting movements among forward caste Hindus in India. In so doing, we may actually bring about that for

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<sup>88</sup> From an article entitled, “The Untouchables,” by J. Waskom Pickett in, *Moving Millions: The Pageant of Modern India*. Pp. 42-74.

which Herbert Hofer<sup>89</sup> longs: “Can you imagine a church in India that draws on all the beauty and profundity of the ancient cultures of India? What a great contribution that would be to the great nation of India and to the worldwide Christian fellowship” (Hofer 2004, 13).

One strength of this approach will be the focus on development of a contextualized theology. The contextualization of Christianity in India will be nothing more than the process of interpreting Christian truth in terms of and applying it to the real life issues arising from the socio-cultural context within which each interpreter lives. It takes seriously both every day human life and God’s desire to be involved in it. If Christianity is universally valid, then it has the answers to the questions Indians are asking. The asking and answering of these questions will be undertaken effectively by following the process for discipleship laid out before us in this thesis and, therefore, will contribute to the development of an Indian Christian Theology. Obviously, the approach presented in this paper does not lend itself to Western models of theological education. Theological Education by Extension could be easily adapted for theological training within the Bhakta system.

The danger always exists when encouraging the use of appropriate contextual forms for some to see syncretism rather than indigenization as its outcome. This paper argues for the use of appropriate contextual forms within caste-Hinduism but does so without any bent toward Hindu-Christian dialogue that has as its stated purpose a blending of the two. To propose a non-church planting approach to facilitating a church planting movement is in actuality an effort toward a unique Indian expression of “church” rather than compromise with existing Hindu philosophies and religious beliefs.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to such an approach to church planting is connecting with the larger Christian Body. The dilemma consists of the church’s claim to universality which it can only realize to a limited extent due to its minority status. However, this larger connecting should be allowed to take place at a natural rate rather than being superimposed upon Indian Christ bhaktas by those from without. Granted, this may indeed be a slow process but the duration of developing a “Body” connection with other believers would seem a necessary sacrifice for the larger good of a church planting movement among forward caste Hindus in India.

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Stated simply, the best approach to facilitating a Church Planting Movement among forward caste Hindus is by *not* planting churches. As contradictory as it sounds, Christian disciples remaining within Hindu culture and familial systems holds the potential for the most indigenous approach to establishing multiplying churches among forward caste Hindus.

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